

# CRB

## The Careers Project

### Focus Group Perspectives on Provisions for Career Exploration and Development Opportunities at Selected Middle and High Schools in California

*By Patricia L. de Cos  
and Katharine Salling*

*At the Request of Senator Roy Ashburn,  
Senator Loni Hancock,  
Assemblymember Lori Saldaña,  
Assemblymember Tom Torlakson,  
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former Assemblymember Greg Aghazarian,  
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**The Careers Project**  
**Focus Group Perspectives on Provisions for**  
**Career Exploration and Development**  
**Opportunities at Selected Middle and High**  
**Schools in California**

*By Patricia L. de Cos  
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### *Internet Access*

This report is part of a series of Careers Project reports that are available through the Internet on the California State Library's home page under CRB Reports (<http://www.library.ca.gov/crb>). Other Careers Project reports include:

- *The Careers Project: School Survey of Middle and High School Principals and Counselors in California*
- *The Careers Project: An Economic Analysis of Ten Industry Clusters in California*
- *The Careers Project: Survey of Representatives of Business and Industry in California*
- *The Careers Project: A Summary with Policy Options*



# Executive Summary

The Careers Project is a study of the preparation all students in public middle and high schools receive to explore career options and the relationship between that preparation and California's state and regional economies. The California Research Bureau (CRB) undertook this research at the request of a bipartisan group of members of the California Legislature, with funding support from the James Irvine Foundation. The study consisted of three distinct phases:

1. A statewide survey of middle and high school counselors and principals.
2. An economic analysis and survey of representatives of business and industry in California.
3. School focus groups.

In each of the three study phases, the CRB research team utilized the nine economic regions defined by the California Economic Strategy Panel of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency as a framework for capturing the diversity of the state.\*

The school focus group phase of the study involved groups of middle and high school students, parents, or school representatives in rural, suburban, and urban communities around the state. The goal was to assess their understanding of California's economy and the students' futures as workers in that economy, and to identify any existing obstacles to providing all students with access to the tools, services, or programs they need to gain that understanding.

The school focus group report provides state policymakers and other interested stakeholders an insight into the many voices of students, teachers, counselors, principals, and parents that the CRB research team had the opportunity to listen to at a dozen school sites located in seven of the state's nine regional economies. Each focus group and school site provided a different perspective on the availability and value of career and economic information and experience for all students. We were especially interested in their understanding of their local economy, the preparation that students might need to succeed in it, and obstacles inhibiting student access to the activities, programs, or tools that would enable them to explore the "world of careers." Each focus group offered suggestions regarding the kinds of activities, programs, or tools that might enhance career exploration or development at their schools.

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\* Please refer to Appendix 1 for a map describing the nine economic regions.



We found that the extent to which students, school staff, or parents understood the role of students in contributing to the state or their regional economy largely reflected on the missions and purposes, as defined by the schools. For example, we found at the middle school level, this connection was minimal, as reflected by the scarce career exploration opportunities offered to their students. The emphasis of three middle schools we visited was largely confined to providing students with basic skills in preparation for high school. This stemmed from the fact that many of the students in these middle schools were not performing at grade level, as measured by the state's standardized tests and their school's placement in Program Improvement under to the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. This may be a missed opportunity, as the middle school students we met with were interested in learning more about the world of work and could benefit from information about educational requirements and the availability of a variety of jobs in the state and regional economies.

At the high school level, the focus group responses of students, school staff, and parents varied, depending on the nature of their schools' priorities. For example, the communities of students, school staff, and parents at six comprehensive high schools visited by the CRB research team focused on preparing all students for high school graduation with an emphasis on pursuing general post-secondary education options, and therefore, those students expressed less specific awareness of career opportunities in their region or the state. However, the CRB research team discovered that among the comprehensive high schools, a couple had developed progressive grade-level career exploratory programs and activities for *all* students that improved their understanding of career options after high school.

Three other high schools we visited that emphasized career and technical education (CTE) had developed a shared culture and vision among students, school staff, and parents. Three key elements included:

- Preparing students for high school graduation while introducing hands-on work experience opportunities.
- Providing students with opportunities to get involved with local business and industries.
- Assisting students with post-secondary education or training options to achieve their future career goals.

The students at these schools exhibited greater awareness of local and state economies and more interest in their future careers. As one principal succinctly put it, "Students leave our school with a plan of where they are going, not [just] a place."

The CRB research team recognized the significance of career development curriculum as an important avenue to provide students with information about different jobs, including likely salaries, prerequisites, and opportunities in the regional or state economies. We found that although each of the nine high school teacher focus groups reported the availability of some career development curricula at their schools, there were



significantly different levels of emphasis on formal, schoolwide career exploration and development course offerings, and participation was not always available to all or even most students. For example, teachers at the magnet, charter, and alternative high schools which emphasized CTE reported that all students received intensive career exploration and development programs that involved hands-on, project-based learning activities. These learning activities were combined with opportunities to interact with local businesses and industries and provided instructional information about jobs and careers as a matter of priority, according to the stated objectives and missions at these schools. In addition, teachers collaborated with one another to integrate and share course objectives between academic departments.

In contrast, at four of the six high schools with comprehensive academic programs (each of which had at least a California Partnership Academy, Career Pathway, Regional Occupation Program elective, or small learning community), focus group teachers were aware that some faculty members offered some career exploration activities for students enrolled in elective courses, but the offerings were limited to those classes. However, at two comprehensive high schools, focus group teachers described a schoolwide career exploration program wherein *all* students were required to present an independent career exploration research project, attend specific, grade-level career development activities, and complete job shadowing and internship hours required for graduation credit.

The CRB research team found that some high schools used career exploratory tools as a mechanism to provide students with general economic information (with varying degrees of reference to their regional or state economy).<sup>\*</sup> Often, student access to career exploration tools was limited, based on grade-level or class enrollment. At these schools some, but not all, students received guidance through school career centers. In some cases, individual teachers assigned research projects that focused on different occupations and their education requirements, salaries, job skills, working conditions, and local availability.

Several of the high school sites we visited had a schoolwide approach to networking and connecting with local industry through business and education alliance memberships or community collaborative groups. This generally required some outreach responsibilities by an administrator, career center staff, a school-to-career coordinator, a ROP teacher, an outreach specialist, or a business alliance liaison. Partnerships with local business or other community groups fostered an environment of mutual support and benefited students through expanded opportunities and material resources. There was consensus among all focus group participants (students, teachers, counselors, principals, and parents) that individual teachers deserved credit for their efforts to organize career activities for their students, or for all students at their schools. Some activities were also

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<sup>\*</sup> Career exploration tools were defined as diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventories to allow students to explore their interests or what they might like to do for a job or career.

sponsored by school districts, local community colleges, or other private educational institutes.

In assessing the obstacles that prevented all students from accessing activities, programs, or tools that could help students to understand the importance of their current studies to their future careers, the CRB research team identified a number of contributing factors.

- Age and Maturity of Students: The age and maturity of many middle school and grade nine and ten high school students determined whether or not they had an awareness of possible career options and the education required to “get them where they wanted to go.” Conversely, most grade 11 and 12 students were fairly articulate regarding their plans for the future and demonstrated some awareness of future options relative to educational or career pursuits.
- Conflicting Enrollments: Some students who were enrolled in special academic programs such as Gifted and Talented Education (GATE), and parents whose children were enrolled in GATE felt that their enrollment precluded them from being able to access CTE or other courses deemed to be valuable to their overall preparation (such as a career-oriented course or the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program).\*
- Minimal Career Guidance: Most of the students participating in the middle school focus groups had not ever consulted with their school counselor and none had had any discussion with a counselor regarding career exploration or development. Only a few of the high school students at the nine focus group sites had consulted with their counselors regarding career exploration or development. A magnet high school with an emphasis on CTE was an exception – all of the grade 11 and 12 students had consulted with their school counselor regarding career development planning.

Recognizing that school counselors have high student caseloads, which vary among school sites and within each school, several parents commented that there were not enough counselors available to provide career guidance to their children, particularly given other priorities related to student academic progress. However, parents commented that it was especially important to have school counselors assist students

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\* According to the California Department of Education, “the primary purpose of the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program is to provide a college preparatory program for students in the middle who are often economically disadvantaged and underachieving. The program enables disadvantaged secondary students to succeed in rigorous curricula, enter mainstream activities in school, and increase their opportunities to enroll in four-year colleges.” See: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/ps/avidsummary.asp>.

The AVID program was raised by focus group participants at various school sites. However, by singling this program does not place judgment of other programs offered throughout the state that were not mentioned by focus group participants (i.e., the Mesa Program, Diploma Program, Middle College or Early College Program, etc.).

with career planning because “as teenagers, they think that their parents don’t know anything.”

Counselors described the need to focus on student progress toward meeting promotion and graduation requirements as a barrier precluding them from providing career guidance to all students. In addition to academic needs, middle school counselors also noted that students’ social, emotional, and health needs often required their attention, decreasing time for guidance in other areas. Several high school counselors agreed that inadequate staffing, combined with a priority on improving academic test scores and graduation rates, were significant obstacles to providing career guidance to all students. One parent commented that counselors spend more time with students who have “problems” than with those without them.

- Parental Involvement: We found that middle school parents had not been invited to career development activities or events at the only middle school where we met with parents. In contrast, most high school parents had been invited to participate in a wide variety of school functions such as career days, college fairs, and other events. While notified of school-sponsored activities, many high school parents said they opted out of participating due to their busy work schedules, other family or conflicting commitments, or because of their belief that their children would benefit more if they were not directly involved. Some parents commented that students (especially in high school) need to begin choosing their own path of interest and to look for guidance independently of parents. For example, a mother was cautious about how she communicated suggestions to her son because he might lose interest if he thought she was pushing an agenda for his future. Counselors and principals encouraged parents to take an active role in helping their children meet expectations for attendance, grades, behavior, but they also emphasized the importance of students assuming responsibility for planning their own career goals.
- Inadequate Resources: Several principals pointed to serious challenges and barriers that inhibit career exploration or development activities, programs, or tools at their sites. These include inadequate resources, no existing structure or mechanism for inclusion in the curriculum, and an emphasis on basic skills instruction for struggling students. These same themes were echoed by some teachers who commented on the lack of student qualifications, academically or behaviorally (language, reading and math proficiency, communication skills, or even criminal records) or student responsibilities at home that prevent them from participating fully in career services offered at their schools. Some teachers also perceived a lack of interest from local business or industry to get involved in their schools, and observed that the distressed socio-economic condition of the neighborhoods in which their schools were located did not provide opportunities for their students.

In connection with Education Code § 51228 (b), teachers and principals shared varying opinions about the expectations for providing career exploration and development services to all students. Some teachers and principals believed that in addition to a lack of funding, the law also needed clarification of its requirements. For instance, one teacher focus group at a comprehensive high school felt their

school's career exploration program exceeded the state's expectations by requiring all students to complete career exploration research, job shadowing and internship assignments, while other focus groups believed that due to a lack of provisions in their school site plans, there was no mechanism for providing formal career exploration or development curriculum for students other than providing basic skills instruction.

- Limited Career Exploration Opportunities: In schools where career activities or programs were available, students found them to be valuable and useful for learning about career possibilities and demonstrating to them the importance of post-secondary education or training. However, in focus group discussions at both middle and high school, students felt that career activities and programs would be improved if there were more variety of representatives from business and industry. They complained that career-fair participants often consisted mainly of law enforcement officers, firefighters, paramedics, or members of the military. Students wanted greater interaction with business and industry, and would appreciate more follow up after career fairs and job shadowing experiences.

Parents held differing views regarding the usefulness of their children's school career development services. Parents, whose children were enrolled at comprehensive high schools, concurred with students that the career activities and programs offered were valuable. However, some parents, like some students, felt that students did not benefit from one-time experiences because there was no follow-up to reinforce the concepts presented to them. Parents whose children were enrolled at schools with a CTE emphasis felt that their children's education was enriched by activities and programs that taught them to be accountable and responsible by learning professional work skills and habits.

Principals considered their schools' career exploration activities, programs, or tools to be useful, in varying degrees, for raising student awareness and providing information about jobs and the regional and state economies. For example, several principals agreed that career exploration activities, programs, or tools help students to develop a vision for their future and the relevance of academic progress. However, principals at several comprehensive high schools said that the career development services did not reach all students or that the information provided was insufficient. One principal commented that, "Some students get more involved in the programs and, therefore, enrich their learning experience more than others, because it's up to them to get out of it what they will." The majority of high school principals gave relatively high ratings to their programs for providing students with first hand experience, or motivating students to study at their grade level, or taking demanding courses and achieving at high levels.

- Student Demand for Programs: Some types of career exploration programs generate more interest, and are more popular than others. Principals at two high schools with a CTE focus reported that when student program enrollment declined, the school's administration discontinued offering those programs or developed another program to

meet students' interest, even though the programs had been designed jointly with representatives of business and industry.

- Career Exploratory Tools: Student and parent focus groups had mixed reviews regarding the usefulness of career exploratory tools.<sup>\*</sup> Most students at schools in which these tools were offered agreed that they were useful in providing a list of possible career options; however, in some cases, students and parents found their results to be too generic, easily manipulated and predictable, or whose outcome did not conform to a student's self-described personality or interest. Students and parents also expressed concern about the results being released to the military after taking the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) Career Exploration Program.<sup>†</sup>
- Business Partnerships: While teachers generally agreed that providing students with economic information and opportunities to interact with local businesses and industries improved their students' understanding of the relevance of their education, many noted that creating and maintaining these partnerships was very time consuming for faculty and administration. This sentiment was also evident in schools whose objectives and missions included career education for all students.

At least one high school parent in each focus group reported that their child(ren) had some experience working with a local business or community organization or had participated in an internship, and they believed that the experience had been very beneficial. However, some parents at comprehensive high schools indicated that the rigors of their children's academic schedules and extracurricular activities, which were deemed necessary for college admissions applications, precluded them from gaining work experience. Counselors, at high schools with business or community involvement, agreed that their students had benefitted from the expanded opportunities and material resources that resulted from the partnerships with business.

This report lists a number of suggestions that were made during the focus groups by participating students, teachers, counselors, principals, and parents. Some of the themes that emerged from all of the focus group participants include:

- Many students expressed the desire to receive more information from guidance counselors about the appropriate high school courses to take to improve future education and career opportunities.

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<sup>\*</sup> Career exploratory tools were defined as diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventories that assist students to explore their interests or what they might like to do for a job or career.

<sup>†</sup> While this was an expressed concern by students and parents, there are instructions for recruitment that include not granting permission to contact or recruit students who have taken the ASVAB Career Exploration Program.

- Many students, counselors, and principals would like access to more hands-on learning experiences that correlate with job opportunities in their local communities. For example, one high school principal recommended providing more resources for students to enable them to experience two weeks of workplace learning (i.e., funding, instructors, and outreach specialists).
- Students, teachers, and parents requested access to electives or expanded programs that correlate to job opportunities in their local communities or other programs such as AVID. Principals and parents also recommended that all students be required to take a career exploration course, either by expanding the grade ten programs or by providing some exposure for grade nine students. Some parents suggested the potential benefits of bringing career education and exploration opportunities to students in middle school.
- Students, counselors, and principals requested access to improved career aptitude or assessment tools and more accurate economic information such as the local job outlook, including educational requirements, job skill sets, working conditions, and salaries, as part of a comprehensive curriculum for career exploration. For example, principals and parents suggested restoring campus library services and implementing a means for students to access web-based career interest inventory software and other reference materials.
- Teachers and principals suggested incorporating concrete career exploratory assignments into their curriculum. That might include, for example, a career development course for students to begin exploring career options that would be incorporated into the schools' master schedules and budgets, including funding for a dedicated teacher position and instructional materials.
- Teachers recommended allowing students to take courses at neighboring high schools or community colleges to augment their school's career development offerings. Similarly, one principal suggested offering students a choice of high schools with different career exploratory or development programs to attend.
- Counselors suggested that schools raise public awareness and interest regarding career education in order to obtain commitment and financial support from the business community and to recruit support from school administrators as well as qualified personnel to serve as educators. A similar suggestion was offered by a principal as a way to raise parent and student awareness, by providing data that show how students benefit from career exploration and development education. Another principal suggested establishing a committee to discuss these issues at the beginning of the next school year. Finally, parents discussed the need to secure funding to develop and support additional career pathways based on research about emerging local employment opportunities.
- Principals suggested organizing a career day for middle school students with presentations from a variety of local representatives. They also suggested enlisting assistance from their districts to: 1) have district school-to-work coordinators

organize career exploratory activities, and 2) fund additional professional development for teachers to include training for presenting career development information to students.

- Principals and parents suggested conducting a senior exit survey to evaluate whether students had benefitted from completing required or voluntary career exploration activities and programs during their enrollment at their schools.
- Parents suggested improving their school's mentoring program for all students, by having the school compile a list of potential mentors for students to contact rather than leaving this responsibility to students.





## Methodology and Procedures

This section describes the school focus group phase of the Careers Project including the methodology and procedures for establishing the focus groups and a discussion of the objectives of this phase of the project. The focus group phase of the study involved groups of middle and high school students, parents, and school representatives in rural, suburban, and urban communities located in seven of the nine economic regions of California.\* Each type of group was convened separately in order to assess their perspectives and to promote a clear and uninhibited exchange of responses to the moderator's questions. The focus group questions were similar for each group, with some variation depending upon the specific group's experience or expertise. The methodology for selecting the school focus group sites and the focus group participants is described below.

### SELECTION OF SCHOOL FOCUS GROUP SITES

The process for selecting the school focus group sites began in February 2008. Schools were selected based on recommendations from legislative offices and from the Association of California School Administrators. The research team contacted the members of the Legislative Advisory Committee for a referral list of potential middle and high school focus group sites. In order to achieve representation of all regions of the state, to the extent practicable, four additional legislators were contacted, two of which identified a middle school and a high school in the Greater Sacramento region to pilot the focus group questions. For a list of the schools, refer to Appendix 2.

Schools were selected in order to achieve a balance based on: (1) school type (rural, suburban or urban) and academic grade levels served (middle or high school); (2) student demographics based on census data about race/ethnicity and eligibility for the free/reduced lunch program; and (3) the geographic location of the school. An invitation to participate was extended to the schools by state legislative offices.

After confirming that the schools had been invited by a legislative member to participate as a Careers Project School Focus Group Site, the CRB research team contacted the schools to schedule a date for convening four, 50- to 60-minute focus groups and a principal interview, to be held during one regular school day at each site. Each school received a written description of the Careers Project focus group objectives as well as

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\* As with the other phases of the project, the research team used the nine economic regions, as developed by the Economic Strategy Panel of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, as a framework.

printed cover letters to parents with consent forms for parental signature, in both English and Spanish, authorizing student participation. Schools were asked to assist the research team by selecting six to ten participants representing the school's general population to participate in each focus group, according to: (1) students in grades seven and eight; grades nine and ten; and grades 11 and 12, where appropriate; (2) teachers; (3) counselors; and (4) parents.

The responses of the school representatives were relatively positive despite clear indications that time is a scarce resource for educators and parents. A total of twelve schools agreed to participate as focus group sites, including three middle schools and nine high schools. The research team travelled to seven economic regions of the state and visited four schools in large urban cities, three in mid-size urban cities, two in suburban areas of large cities, two in rural metropolitan areas, and one in a small rural town. Please refer to Appendix 3 (Table 1) for school enrollment and student demographic information of the participating focus group schools. This report references individual schools using a "school code" ascribed to each participating school site (i.e., MS-1 through MS-3 and HS-1 through HS-9).

The research team began pilot testing the moderator guides with focus groups at two schools in mid April, and visited ten schools in late April, May, and early June 2008.

## **SELECTION OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

The selection criterion for the individual focus group participants, including students, teachers, counselors, and parents, was that their characteristics should reflect the school's general population. Each focus group met with the research team separately in a designated area where conversations could be confined to only the group participants and the research team.

Although the research team met with diverse groups of students and staff at most schools, at a few sites focus groups were composed mainly of students enrolled in a particular program for high-achieving students. For example, at one middle school, the student group included a majority of students involved in a leadership class (MS-2), while in other schools, groups included several students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses or the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program (HS-1, HS-5, MS-1, and MS-3). At one high school, most of the students in the focus group were enrolled in an elective offered through the school's Regional Occupational Program (ROP) (HS-6). Three of the high schools were alternative schools with an emphasis on career and technical education. The participants at these schools, however, did represent the overall population of their schools.

Although most of the focus groups were convened in a designated classroom, conference room, or library where only participants were present, at one site a school vice principal (who had formerly been a teacher) participated in the teacher focus group and also remained in the classroom during the parent focus group. At two separate high schools, a teacher remained in the classroom during the student focus group sessions (HS-7 and HS-2).

Although these circumstances might be considered violations of the focus group criteria, in evaluating the aggregate responses of all participants across all groups, the research team concludes that individual participant affiliation with a particular school program or department did not impact the integrity of their responses. For example, discussions with a student group comprised mainly of GATE students revealed that these students were not able or eligible to participate in their school's ROP program, given their GATE status. One GATE student said he was unwilling to forfeit his enrollment in GATE in order to take a health academy class to explore his career interest in becoming a pediatrician. We found it useful to learn the perspectives of GATE students about their inability to access career exploration and orientation services at their schools.

Similarly, the presence of a teacher or school administrator in another focus group does not appear to have had any influence on the responses of the participants, and therefore, did not undermine the integrity of the focus group responses.

At each of the 12 school sites at least six and up to 12 students participated in the student focus group(s). Principals at eleven of the schools were available for a 50- to 60-minute interview; a vice principal was available in lieu of the principal at one comprehensive high school. Focus groups were convened with counselors at eight of the 12 sites (two high school sites had only one counselor available for an interview, and counselors at one middle school site were unable to attend). Focus groups were convened with teachers at each site during their preparatory or lunch periods. Parent focus groups were convened at seven of the 12 sites, with approximately three to five parents participating in each group. Two of the parent groups were conducted primarily in Spanish.

## **DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOL SITES AND COMPOSITION OF FOCUS GROUPS**

Among the three middle school focus groups, the research team met with 29 students in grades seven and eight, 13 teachers, four counselors, and three parents, and interviewed the principal at each of the three middle schools. As shown in Table 1 of Appendix 3, two of the middle schools were located in large cities (populations of 250,000 or more) and the third in a mid-size city (population of less than 250,000). Enrollment at each of the three middle schools includes a high percentage of English Learners and students who qualify for the Free or Reduced Lunch Program. All three of the middle schools were in Program Improvement status under to the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB).

Among the high school focus groups, the research team met with 146 high school students in 17 focus groups, 50 teachers, 27 counselors, 21 parents, and ten principals. The nine school sites represented a range of characteristics, including large or small schools in urban, suburban, or rural locations, and programs emphasizing either comprehensive educational or career technical educational (CTE) programs. For example,

- Two of the high schools were located in large urban cities; one of these schools had CTE emphasis while the second offered a comprehensive program (HS-4 and HS-5).

- Two schools were located in mid-sized urban cities; one offered a CTE emphasis while the other offered a comprehensive program (HS-8 and HS-1).
- Two schools were located in suburban metropolitan areas; one offered a CTE emphasis while the other offered a comprehensive program (HS-3 and HS-2).
- Two schools located in rural metropolitan areas and a third school in a small town each offered comprehensive education programs (HS-6, HS-7, and HS-9).

Although most of the focus groups were conducted in the English language, two parent groups were conducted in Spanish (HS-1 and MS-3). Of the 12 schools visited, parent groups were convened at only seven schools due to lack of volunteers. Additional description of the parent focus groups is included in the Parent Focus Group section of this report.

## **THE RESEARCH TEAM AND MODERATOR’S GUIDES**

The moderator guides for each focus group (students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators) were designed with initial input from the American Institutes of Research and WestEd. The guides also received a broad review from members of the California Legislative Advisory committee and various stakeholders. Please refer to Appendix 4 for a list of reviewers. The comments and suggestions of the reviewers were incorporated into the moderator guides, which were also pilot-tested at one middle school and one high school in the Greater Sacramento region. To accommodate Spanish-speaking parents participating in the focus groups, the moderator’s guide for the parent focus group was translated into Spanish, along with the parental consent form, the cover letter, and the student participation consent form for parental signature. The moderator’s guide for each focus group is included in this report as Appendix 5.

The CRB research team was comprised of the moderator and the focus group coordinator; each of whom recorded field notes of each focus group discussion. Following each focus group discussion, the research team debriefed to note key themes. Later, the research team’s field notes were transcribed, and a synopsis was drawn for each focus group to analyze general and specific themes. The chapters that follow provide the perspectives of each focus group, according to their responses relating to: student access of each school’s career guidance; curriculum; and activities, programs, or tools for career exploration and development. The discussion also summarizes focus group responses relating to students’ understanding of their regional economy and the state’s economy and the career options or opportunities afforded through their schools’ involvement with local businesses or community organizations.

# Student Focus Groups

## SUMMARY

The following chapter describes focus group discussions with students convened at three middle schools and at nine high schools to learn the perspectives of students regarding the opportunities to access activities, programs, or tools for career exploration and orientation of future career options given their regional and statewide economies. In response to questions and discussion prompts, the students described the various programs offered or other efforts made at their schools to provide them with career awareness education including information about their regional and state economy. The findings from these focus groups were based upon the students' individual comments as well as the overarching themes that emerged across all of the student focus group discussions. This summary will briefly refer to these themes, and the sections below provide additional context.

The three middle school focus groups consisted of no more than 12 and no less than eight students enrolled in seventh and eighth grades, for a total of 29 middle school students. At the high school level, grades nine and ten were combined for a total of eight focus groups, involving 69 students in total. Grades 11 and 12 were also combined for nine focus groups, where a total of 77 students convened. All references herein to the terms "student" or "students" relate only to those students who participated in the focus groups at the selected school sites and are not meant to include other children attending the focus group schools or children attending any other public schools.

This summary and the report that follows it are intended to supplement and provide context to the data collected through the Careers Project middle and high school principal and counselor survey. In general, the student focus group phase of this study revealed that:

- Students attending high schools with intensive career exploration and development programs involving hands-on, project-based learning activities, together with opportunities to interact with local businesses and industries, exhibited greater awareness of and interest in potential careers in their local regions. These students also shared their motivation and enthusiasm about completing high school and progressing toward post-secondary education or training in a particular career field.
- Students attending schools with comprehensive academic programs and emphasis on meeting the University of California a-g admission requirements exhibited less

specific awareness of potential career opportunities available in their local region or statewide.\* In general, many of these students exhibited greater interest in continuing with their education with the broader intention of obtaining a college degree or training certification. This may be attributed in part to the fact that many students participating in the focus groups at these schools were enrolled in the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program, whose emphasis is on the academic preparation of students for post-secondary education, and whose enrollment may preclude them from enrolling in a ROP or other career-oriented course or program.

- Students attending high schools with an emphasis on CTE demonstrated introductory-level knowledge and understanding about their regional economies in terms of awareness about local industry and employers. Most of these students also had or expected to have some work-related experience such as a job shadowing, an internship, or other hands-on learning experience related to some type of industry or career field.
- In general, some of the students at the comprehensive high schools had completed or expected to complete some basic career exploration research, however, this trend varied in intensity from site to site. For example, students at some high schools engaged in career exploration relative to their enrollment in a specific course, whereas other high school students were required to complete grade-level career research assignments to meet schoolwide learning objectives.
- Most of the students participating in middle school focus groups had not consulted with their school counselor and none had any discussions with a counselor regarding career exploration or development.
- Only a few of the high school students of all the focus group sites had consulted with their counselors regarding career exploration or development (one exception was found at a magnet high school with emphasis on CTE where all of the grade 11 and 12 students had consulted with their school counselor regarding career development planning). Most of the students participating in the high school focus groups had met with counselors only once to discuss their class schedules, grades, graduation status, or college eligibility or applications requirements.
- All of the high school focus group students were preparing to graduate, and many students were expecting to enroll in a community college, university, or technical institute programs in the future. Only a few students aspired to a specific career pathway; most had a general occupational field in mind such as public safety, health care and medicine, engineering, etc. In each focus group, there was at least one

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\* The a-g requirements referenced throughout this report may be found on the University of California's 2008 Guide to "a-g" Requirements and Instructions for Updating Your School's "a-g" Course List at [http://www.ucop.edu/a-gGuide/ag/content/Guidetoga-gReqs\\_2008.pdf](http://www.ucop.edu/a-gGuide/ag/content/Guidetoga-gReqs_2008.pdf).



student who expressed some uncertainty or did not wish to share specific thoughts about future career or employment choices.

- Middle school students had very limited and restricted access to career exploration activities, programs, or tools at their schools.
- Many middle school and several grade nine to ten focus groups students did not demonstrate significant awareness regarding possible career options or related educational requirements.
- Most grade 11 and 12 students were fairly articulate regarding their plans for the future and demonstrated some awareness of future educational options or, in some cases, future career options to pursue following high school graduation.
- Many high school and some middle school students had received some information about jobs and careers from adult family members or friends. According to all of the student focus groups, however, *teachers* were the most likely source of information received by students related to careers.
- Students at each comprehensive high school had at least one choice of Regional Occupational Program (ROP) elective or other self-selected independent career exploration research opportunity.
- When career activities or programs were available, students found them valuable and useful for learning about career possibilities and for demonstrating to them the importance of post-secondary education or training, if warranted. However, focus group discussions at both the middle and high school levels indicated that students felt the activities and programs would be improved with more variety of representatives from business and industry (career-fair participants often consisted mainly of law enforcement officers, firefighters, paramedics, or members of the military), greater interaction with business and industry, and follow up to career fairs and the job shadowing experiences.
- Most students participating in the focus group sites where career exploratory tools were offered responded that the results were useful in providing a list of possible career options based upon the students' personality profile. However, some students responded that the results were too generic, easily manipulated and predictable, and the outcomes may or may not match a student's self-described personality or interest.
- Many students requested access to more hands-on learning experiences and electives that correlate to job opportunities in their local communities. Students also requested access to improved aptitude assessment tools and more accurate information about employment skill sets and salaries.
- Many students expressed the desire to receive more information from guidance counselors about appropriate high school courses to take to improve future education and career opportunities. An exception to this theme was noted at two high schools with a CTE emphasis, where students indicated that the career exploration

information and preparation provided to them by their teachers was satisfactory and sufficient.

The following sections elaborate in more detail the findings of the research team based upon discussions with focus group students at each of the three middle schools and the nine high schools selected for this study.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS FOR CAREER OPTIONS**

This section provides insight on the perspectives of grade seven through 12 students with regard to the availability of resources that promote student preparation for career development. Student focus group questions related to access to school career guidance counseling and other academic services, programs, activities, or interest evaluation tools specifically provided or available to students for career exploration, planning, or preparation.

### **Guidance Counseling**

Each focus group was asked whether or not and how often students consult with school counselors about career interests. Many students stated that they had not spoken with their counselors, and only a few who had met with a counselor had specifically discussed career possibilities. Among the 17 high school student focus groups, there was only one group where all participating grade 11 and 12 students had met with their school counselors and discussed plans for after high school graduation (HS-4). Most students stated that their discussions with counselors relate to:

- Class schedules, grades, and graduation status.
- Advice on college eligibility, admissions tests, and applications requirements.

Although students' responses generally reveal that they do not meet with guidance counselors regarding career interests specifically, most of the high school focus group students demonstrated some level of awareness of the education and training after high school that is required to pursue a job or career. Several grades 11 and 12 students had received advice from counselors about how to independently research colleges for programs in specific areas of study (such as computer engineering, health sciences, or construction management), and other students had received guidance relating to their applications for colleges or universities.

This is in contrast to responses from students participating in focus groups at the middle school level where:

- Most students had not consulted with counselors in general or with regard to career interests; and
- Most students appeared to be uncertain or unaware of career options and related educational or training requirements.

In terms of barriers or obstacles to consulting with school counselors, students participating in focus groups at two large, comprehensive high schools reported that counselors were “very busy,” “there is usually a long waiting time to see a counselor,” and appointments were often made during class time rather than before or after school or at other such times more convenient to students (HS-2 and HS-5). Students also expressed wanting additional and more frequent access to counselors throughout the four years of high school for services such as scheduling changes, advice about what classes to take, and information about college programs, costs, etc. One grade 12 student at a large suburban high school commented that if she had met more often with her counselor during grades ten and 11 to learn more about which courses were important for college admissions, she would have been more inclined and motivated to take challenging courses and been more focused to achieve at a higher level (HS-2). Students also commented that meeting with school counselors and asking for advice is dependent upon how comfortable students feel with their counselor because “it is very personal” (HS-1 and HS-2).

Many students also indicated that discussing career interests with an adult family member or trusted adult friend provided them with some guidance about pursuing potential options for career development.

Each student focus group was also asked whether teachers or administrators at their school provide career guidance. Focus group students at both middle and high schools stated that some teachers were available to provide career guidance at any time students asked for assistance and that, of all the school personnel, teachers were the most likely source of information related to careers. At two high schools with emphasis on career technical education (CTE), students described extensively that teachers provide advice on career questions, organize guest speaker presentations, and coordinate field trips and internship opportunities that relate to their curriculum objectives (HS-3 and HS-8).

### **Career Development Curriculum Offered**

Concerning curriculum for career exploration, focus group students at several of the high schools described a schoolwide curriculum that requires all students to complete career exploration activities and research projects according to grade-level (HS-1, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). However, student focus groups at comprehensive high schools offering at least one elective through the regional occupation program (ROP) and high schools with small learning communities, career pathways, or career academies reported that any career exploration curriculum that is offered is extended only to those students enrolled in the particular ROP elective course or career academy and that such curriculum is not required of all students. In addition, students at these sites reported that ROP electives and career academy courses were not available to those enrolled in the Gifted and Talented Education program, referred to as GATE students (HS-1 and HS-2).

One charter high school focus group site serves grades 11 and 12 students, who attend career development courses three hours per day either before or after classes at their home high school in one of two area school districts. Students participating in this focus group were enrolled in one of the four different learning labs organized around career

clusters such as professional sciences, advanced communications, global dynamics and engineering (HS-3). Students related a great deal of enthusiasm about attending this high school and described a desire to master the curriculum offered as opposed to feeling compelled to complete the tasks simply for credit.

At another high school with CTE emphasis, the two student focus groups each described the CTE curriculum organized as a construction management and technologies career academy. Students in grades nine through 12 apply to attend this magnet high school, and many reported they had chosen to or were directed to by their parents because the high schools in their residential areas were either overcrowded or were plagued by juvenile crime issues. Students at this school also exhibited enthusiasm about the courses and curriculum offered (HS-4).

At the middle schools, students advised the research team that “teachers sometimes discuss jobs and careers in class” or informally after class. One very articulate middle school student indicated that, while attending the site’s afterschool and Saturday programs, he had received guidance from a teacher for college and career research on the Internet. This student had also attended a field trip to three college campuses and a jet propulsion lab located in the region, which was coordinated by a teacher for students in her class. The student added that he plans to choose a college where he can receive education and training to qualify him for future employment at the jet propulsion lab (MS-1). At another middle school, a student described how the activities provided in the afterschool program she attended had inspired her to consider becoming a lawyer in the future (MS-2). Aside from these two reports, however, student focus groups at the middle schools indicated that there is little or no curriculum offered for career exploration or development.

## **Evaluation of Career Development Activities, Programs, and Tools**

### ***Career Exploration Activities***

Students at each focus group were asked whether their school offers activities for career exploration such as career day, college fair, field trips, or guest speaker presentations. Such activities were very limited at the middle school level. For example, students at two of the middle school sites reported that activities such as guest speakers or field trips were provided only to those students who attend the after school programs offered at their schools (MS-1 and MS-2). At the third middle school, grade eight students recalled attending a career day at their school the previous year which presented public safety careers such as law enforcement and fire protection services (MS-3). Grade seven students at this school had not had any activities offered to them prior to convening the focus group.

Career exploration activities were more prevalent at the high school level. Most of the students in each of the focus groups were aware of or had attended a college and career-fair held at their campus or within their local area at least once per year. Students commented that access to career exploration activities is often coordinated by and dependent upon the efforts of their teachers, regardless of whether the school has a CTE

focus or whether students were enrolled in a particular career-oriented class, pathway, “house,” lab, or academy. Focus group students described the career exploration activities offered at their schools as follows:

- At a charter high school with emphasis on CTE, students attended field trips and presentations by guest speakers on topics related to the subject matter of the particular labs offered by the school. Students in each lab were required to work in teams and to organize group presentations on required career research assignments (HS-3).
- At an urban magnet high school with emphasis on CTE, students frequently attended presentations by representatives from colleges and from industry in the fields of construction management, engineering, and architecture. Students also described a recent field trip to Qualcomm, a wireless technology manufacturer. In addition, seniors were required to design, build, and present a construction project at an annual event judged by industry representatives who offer a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” evaluation of student presentations (HS-4).
- At an urban alternative high school with emphasis on CTE, students attended a career exploration class in grade nine. All students also attended an annual career day with college and business representatives; teachers coordinated guest speaker presentations for students according to academy subject matter. Grades 11 and 12 students were required to complete a cap-stone career research project and present their information to younger classmates (HS-8).
- A large comprehensive suburban high school offered students with activities such as a college fair once per year with business and college representatives. Seniors also participated in a mock interview seminar hosted by the school annually (HS-1).
- Students at a large comprehensive urban high school stated that activities were coordinated by individual teachers for specific small learning communities. For example, the Business Information and Technology “house” offered those students with activities such as a leadership conference, a dress for success assembly, an annual field trip to local college campuses, and guest speakers to discuss career options in that field. According to students, other “houses” may or may not be offered these types of activities (HS-5).
- Students in grade 11 at a large comprehensive school were required to attend a “Connecting to Success” seminar which provided employment interview training; grade 12 students were required to complete activities for a career research project to meet graduation requirements. Students at this school were also aware of a recent career fair held at their local community college, although none of them had attended, and a college fair that was offered at the school for only those students with 3.0 GPA or better. (HS-7).
- Grade nine and ten students at a rural comprehensive high school recalled a combined careers day and college fair as well as a guest speaker presentation from NASA that included a demonstration and access to a flight simulator (HS-6).
- At a small, rural comprehensive high school, students were required to complete a career research project each year and attend a career fair. Grade 11 students participated in a tour of several California colleges, which in 2008 also included a tour of the Cisco Industries plant, and activities such as career day were offered (HS-9).

Each student focus group was also asked whether activities were offered through a career center on their school campus. None of the middle school student focus groups reported having a career center on their campuses. However, many of the high school students indicated that their schools had a designated career center on campus where students could obtain information about jobs or access the Internet for career exploration and research. An ROP teacher or coordinator was also located at each of the schools with a designated career center (HS-1, HS-2, HS-6, and HS-7).

Focus group students at sites with career centers were aware that job announcements and other information about work experience and careers could be found at the center. However, several students commented that access to the center and its information was voluntary and dependent on the interest of each student (HS-2, HS-6, and HS-7). For instance, at one comprehensive suburban school, student referred to a new speaker series offered in the career center at lunch time. Students were invited to attend the “brown bag series” for presentations by local business and community representatives. Students commented that that even though the presentations may offer useful information, many students chose not to “give up” their lunch hour to attend, and in some cases, the presentations were not well advertised or promoted to students (HS-2).

Student focus groups at high schools without a designated career center reported accessing career information via the Internet from their schools’ campus library, a multimedia lab or computer applications classroom (HS-3, HS-4, HS-5, HS-8, and HS-9). However, there was some variation among students at these different schools with respect to how interested they were in accessing the resources available to them for career exploration.

### ***Career Exploration and Development Programs***

Each student focus group was asked to describe whether their school offered “programs” defined as job shadowing, mentoring, internships, work experience, or career education programs. At the middle school level, the student focus groups revealed that there were no programs offered for career development during the regular school day. Students at one middle school commented that the school only offered two elective courses and that their music program was expected to be eliminated due to budget constraints (MS-3).

Career exploration and development programs were more prevalent at the high school level. Several of the high school student focus groups described a concerted, schoolwide, program-approach to career exploration in which students were required to complete grade-level learning objectives (HS-1, HS-3, HS-4, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). For example:

- Focus group students at a rural comprehensive high school described a “career pathways” program which required students to complete an interest inventory test, develop a “personal learning plan” and enroll in related courses and electives, attend career fairs in grades nine and ten, participate in a one-week job shadowing experience in grades ten and 11, and complete a senior project related to college and career in grade 12 (HS-9).

- Another student focus group at a large comprehensive suburban high school reported a similar program with progressive, grade-level requirements focused around themes such as “Who Am I” for grade nine, “What Are My Options” for grade ten, “Where Do I Go from Here” for grade 11, and “How Am I Going to Get There” for grade 12. The career exploration learning objectives were embedded in core curriculum and included self assessment, research of career fields, job shadowing, a Connect-to-Success seminar, a 45-hour job internship, and a senior project presentation for graduation credit. According to these students, the school offered 16 career pathways; however, the ROP and most school-to-career programs were available only to grades 11 and 12 students (HS-7).
- Students at a charter high school with emphasis on CTE spoke highly of the school’s programs, indicating that they were developing valuable skills and knowledge that motivated them to progress and continue learning more in the fields of science and technology. Students indicated that not all students would thrive with the school’s lab format, project-based learning, and team-work approach. However, the school’s environment promoted students’ desire to learn and valued student accountability and responsibility for their own work and the work of their group. One student at this school referred to the benefits of project-based learning by describing the challenges of coordinating the efforts of classmates in two different labs. In addition to learning skills for designing and constructing a scale model, the students also learned how to create an organizational structure and how to coordinate tasks to meet deadlines (HS-3).
- At an alternative urban high school with CTE focus, students discussed the Virtual Enterprise and SkillsUSA programs coordinated by teachers at their school. According to these students, they had to apply the technical skills they had learned to develop projects that they entered into competitions for opportunities to earn recognition awards and scholarships (HS-8).
- At an urban magnet high school, students explained that the school’s program allowed them to learn the same skills and techniques used in the construction engineering and management professions. Throughout the four years of high school, all students attending this school were required to complete many projects and were required to conduct on-going career exploration research assignments. Beginning in grade 11, students participated in the school’s job shadowing and internship program if they maintained a 3.0 GPA or better and had a good citizenship rating based on punctuality and other responsible behaviors (HS-4).

### ***Career Exploration Tools***

The student focus groups were asked whether their schools offered tools for exploring career interests and options for what students “might like to do for a job or career.” Tools were defined to include diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventories that were often available through web-based computer software.

Students participating in focus groups at each of the middle school sites stated that career exploration tools were not available or offered to them at their schools.

Career exploration tools were offered at many of the high school focus group sites. Student focus groups at four of the comprehensive high schools and at two of the alternative high schools with CTE emphasis each revealed that such tools were offered



and available either (1) through their school's career center, (2) through a particular class, or (3) for all students at a particular grade-level (HS-1, HS-2, HS-4, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). Two other student focus groups reported that although no specific tools were available, students had access to the Internet and received website links to help with their career exploration research assignments (HS-3 and HS-5). At these two schools, all students at one site had to complete career exploration assignments as part of the program requirements (HS-4), whereas students at the second site were offered access to career exploration tools on the basis of enrollment in specific classes (HS-5).

### ***Usefulness of Activities, Programs, and Tools***

Students in all focus groups found that activities and programs, when available, were valuable and useful for guiding them to learn about career possibilities and demonstrating to them the importance of a college education or training, if warranted. However, focus group discussions at both the middle and high school levels indicated that students felt the activities and programs would be improved with more variety of representatives from business and industry, greater interaction with business and industry, and follow up to career fairs and the job shadowing experiences. For example, students reported that career fair participants often consisted mainly of law enforcement officers, firefighters, paramedics, or members of the military and were absent of representatives from various other local or regional businesses or industries. Furthermore, students at one comprehensive high school suggested that many students would be more inclined to participate in career day or college fair activities if the events were held on their high school campus during the week as opposed to the local community college on a Saturday (HS-7).

With regard to job shadowing activities, many high school students found them to be useful in raising their awareness about a job or career (HS-2, HS-4, HS-5, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). However, some students revealed that because they had little or no personal connections with business or industry representatives, they chose any suggested employer or mentor or simply job shadowed with a parent to fulfill a school requirement rather than seeking a mentor to job shadow in a career field of interest to the student (HS-7).

Similar discussion with other high school student focus groups revealed that students perceived a more successful mentoring and job shadowing experience when school faculty or other adults had been involved with forming partnerships between students and mentors or had extended some other effort to bridge the gaps between students, the school, business, or community organizations (HS-4, HS-8, and HS-9). For example, at a small, rural comprehensive high school, students indicated that one of the teachers was responsible for coordinating all the job shadowing assignments and mentor meetings with business based on each student's career interests (HS-9). Most of the students at this site who had participated in at least one job shadowing experience expressed enthusiasm and indicated that they were motivated to progress at grade-level and beyond with a goal in mind of proceeding to college or additional training in their field of interest. Students at this high school also explained that if particular elective courses for their learning plan were not offered at their campus, a school van was available to transport students to a neighboring high school or to the local community college to take courses (HS-9). At

another high school with CTE emphasis, students reported that their school provided bus passes to facilitate their daily transportation to the school from home and to internship locations and field trips (HS-8).

In discussing different career development activities, students participating in a focus group at an urban comprehensive high school described a process wherein students at the end of grade eight had to choose and pre-enroll in a pathways “house” or academy offered at the high school they would enter for grade nine (HS-5). Discussions with these students revealed that many believed they did not have enough information in grade eight about the various program choices, and they were frustrated that the high school’s policy prohibited them from transferring to another “house” or academy. In discussions with other focus groups at sites with similarly designed career pathways or academies, students expressed greater satisfaction when their school policy allowed them to transfer to another academy program after one year (HS-3, HS-4, HS-8, and HS-9). As some students expressed, it was as important for them to find out what they liked doing as it was to learn about what they did not like.

At schools where career exploration tools were offered, student focus groups were asked to discuss whether the tools were useful in raising students’ awareness and providing information about different career fields. Students referred to web-based software offered at *Bridges.com*, *GetInsights.com*, *HealthInsights.com*, and *Naviance.com*, in addition to the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) Career Exploration Program. Most students participating in the focus groups where such tools were offered responded that the survey results were useful in providing a list of possible career options based upon the students’ personality profile. However, some students responded that the survey results were too generic, easily manipulated and predictable, and whose outcomes may or may not match a student’s self-described personality or interest. One student expressed the concern that the military would have access to the results of the ASVAB and “not stop bothering us” (HS-9).

Regarding the two focus group sites where such career exploration tools were not offered, students at the charter high school with CTE emphasis explained that they were instructed to find information on Internet websites, which was useful for guiding them to research information about career interests (HS-3). Students at the second focus group site explained that a business and information technologies teacher assigns an Internet research project to students that requires them to discover educational requirements, working conditions and salaries. Students at this site commented that they were not aware of access to other tools for career exploration at their school (HS-5).

## **PERSPECTIVES REGARDING AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS TO CALIFORNIA’S OVERALL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES**

The following section provides students’ perspectives with regard to the availability of resources and information that promote awareness and orient them to the state or regional economy. It also describes students’ understanding about their potential role as contributors to the economy in the future. Questions presented to each student focus group related to the nature of economic and employment information provided by the

schools, first hand opportunities available to students for connecting with businesses or community organizations locally or regionally, students' expectations about their future and their awareness of what types of education and skills would be required for a job or career of interest.

### **Economic and Employment Information Provided by Schools**

To gain a perspective on the resources available to orient students to the state and regional economies, student focus groups were asked whether their school provides information about jobs and careers in California and in their local region. Affirmative responses came from students in focus groups at four high schools that have an emphasis on CTE (HS-3, HS-4, HS-8, and HS-9). These students also demonstrated an awareness of the local and regional employers and industry job opportunities. Among all student focus groups, however, the most prevalent response was that information in this regard was not necessarily provided by the schools, but that teachers directed them to conduct independent research and to report on one or more careers of their choice. In some instances, students were required to include in their reports correlating economic details such as salaries, training requirements, and working conditions.

A few of the student focus groups reported that they received general information in connection with an interest inventory test or survey consisting of salary ranges and projections on "where jobs were growing" (HS-1, HS-2, and HS-8). Students attending an alternative high school with an emphasis on CTE received the *Occupational Handbook* published by the Labor Market Information Division of the Employment Development Department (HS-8).

Among the middle school focus groups, grades seven and eight students reported having an occasional and informal discussion with some of their teachers about jobs or career fields as an introduction to economic information. Discussions with these focus groups indicated that most middle school students had very limited knowledge about career fields and related skill or educational requirements.

All student focus groups were presented with samples of an economic analysis of the fastest growing and largest jobs in four industry clusters in California, including their corresponding skills and average annual salaries. Upon inquiry as to whether the analysis would be useful for raising awareness or providing information, students agreed that it was "helpful to see what skills are needed for different jobs and careers," that it would be "helpful for students who have not yet decided what to do in the future," and that it would also be "helpful to motivate students to stay out of trouble and study harder." One precocious middle school student immediately identified skills she had already developed and the skills she would need to acquire for her career interest (MS-3). Introducing the economic information provoked discussions among students in which many agreed they would benefit from receiving similar economic information as early as grades seven through nine and continuing throughout high school in order to help develop their interests and to motivate them "to begin preparing for careers earlier in high school."

## **Opportunities for Students to Engage with Local Business or Community Organizations**

Students in each focus group were asked to describe their individual experiences with local businesses or community organizations such as internships, mentoring, job shadowing or work experience, and to discuss whether the experiences increased their interest in pursuing a particular career field. Responses varied in terms of the degree to which internships or job shadowing opportunities were required of students, merely offered as work experience for credit, or not available at all. Focus groups at high schools with ROP, California Partnership Academies, or career pathways reported opportunities were provided either for all students or for only those students enrolled in specific courses. Some students revealed an understanding that certain types of businesses, industries or organizations may offer students job shadowing or internship opportunities more than others due to issues of safety, confidentiality, or level of expertise required at a job site. Some students expressed awareness of the importance of mature conduct and responsible behavior when entering the working world and the reality that some students were still developing these characteristics.

In general, students participating in focus groups at the high schools with emphasis on CTE were more articulate when discussing internship and job shadowing opportunities with local or regional businesses and industries and also in describing important character traits required to successfully participate and complete an internship or job shadowing assignment. With regard to eligibility for job shadowing and internships, students at several schools reported that opportunities were available primarily to students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 (ages 16 or older) and were predicated upon other factors such as class enrollment (such as a ROP course), grade point average, or citizenship performance. Thus, such opportunities at some schools may not be available for *all* students, and those students who were performing below a specified level may be excluded.

A student focus group at a rural comprehensive high school reported grade ten students were required to complete a two-day job shadowing assignment linked to the results of their own interest inventory test and “personal learning pathway” (HS-9). Students in focus groups where job shadowing was coordinated by faculty and essentially linked to students’ interest assessment demonstrated more enthusiasm about their experiences than students required to independently find mentors and job shadowing opportunities. Where faculty members were not involved in coordinating the job shadowing and mentorship assignments, focus group discussions revealed that students might not have had adequate local contacts to connect with business and employers, and consequently, had completed the required job shadowing at a place of employment with a parent, relative or other adult in a field that was not necessarily within their own area of interest (HS-2 and HS-7). Students at such sites expressed less enthusiasm about the experience overall and commented that job shadowing was useful “if the student took advantage of the opportunity” and “if the student knew someone in the job of their career interest.”

Nonetheless, students who reported having completed a job shadowing or internship opportunity agreed that such experiences were useful in general and were beneficial in particular for providing them with some first hand experience that led them to either

continue with an interest in a career field or that led them to re-evaluate and investigate other areas of interest. Students felt that both outcomes were equally valuable.

Most of the high school focus group students, who had completed a job shadowing or internship opportunity, indicated that the experience provided them with motivation and encouraged them to plan for graduation and their future. Focus group students in grades nine and ten students, who had expectations for such experiences at subsequent grade levels, demonstrated positive anticipation for job shadowing and internship opportunities and expressed a desire to begin career exploration in their current grade.

## **Planning for the Future and Awareness of Career Opportunities**

### ***Life after High School***

To gain perspectives on the students' understanding of economic opportunities in California and their local region, each focus group was invited to share individual expectations for life in the future (following high school and later), to discuss material and non-material values and their personal outlooks. Various responses were recorded. Many students, in both the middle and the high school focus groups, described expectations for "working hard," "having a job" and being "financially secure" after high school. Many students described wanting to "own a home" and to "help people" including family members with financial, medical, or legal concerns. Many students also described wanting to "feel accomplished" and "respected" in the future, and many commented on the importance of having "a job that you enjoy and that pays well enough to support yourself." Students also discussed the value in having a job that utilizes personal talents and abilities. Some focus group students (mainly in grades 11 and 12) discussed expectations for marriage and children in the future and the value in having the ability to provide for and spend time with family.

Some of the high school focus group students described themselves as being the first in their families to attend or to graduate from high school. Many of these students planned to continue with college after graduation (HS-1, HS-5, and HS-8). Located at sites where 60 to 80 percent of students were eligible for the free or reduced lunch program, these focus groups discussed the future in terms of working to obtain "a decent house and two cars," wanting to improve and "upgrade" their lives.

Some focus group students discussed future expectations for contributing to the improvement of their local communities, while others held expectations to leave their area and pursue careers of interest elsewhere. One student focus group at a charter school with CTE emphasis expressed an understanding that the local economy was evolving and developing new and different industries, a factor that those students were taking into consideration in evaluating potential future careers (HS-3). Students in a focus group at another urban CTE school discussed the decision of one of their classmates to enlist with the U.S. Marine Corps in order "to earn a steady paycheck, medical benefits, and a college scholarship" as part of his commitment to the military.

In general, the student focus groups with grades 11 and 12 had more articulate discussions about ideas and plans for the future than the focus groups with students in the lower grades. This was likely due partly to developmental maturity of these students, but also may be related to the greater extent to which grades 11 and 12 students have had opportunities for career exploration that had prompted them to think about their futures.

### *Awareness of Career Opportunities*

Students in each focus group were invited to describe their ideas about the jobs or careers they were considering or interested in, how they had learned about these jobs or careers, and what skills, school preparation, or work experience they would need for their jobs or careers of interest. Students in all focus groups reported learning of various careers through discussions with family members, friends, teachers, or through some level of school-related career exploration research.

The focus group students at high schools where career exploration research was required revealed a greater understanding of the process for achieving their career of interest and demonstrated a more informed impression of what skills, education and work experience would be necessary for a specific career field (HS-3, HS-4, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9), in comparison to the focus group students at high schools without a schoolwide career exploration program (HS-1, HS-2, HS-5, and HS-6).

Of the career fields listed by focus group students, many were professions which require advanced college degrees or specialized training such as law (attorneys, judges, enforcement officers), medicine (nurses, pediatricians, surgeons, physical therapists, veterinarians), engineering, architecture, photography, graphic design, sound recording and film production, food service and cooking, video game design, military service, teaching, business, psychology, and counseling. This pattern is particularly apparent among student focus groups at comprehensive high schools and middle schools.

Students in focus groups at high schools with career pathways, small learning communities or emphasis on career and technical education identified career possibilities such as bio-engineering, molecular biology, biomedicine, mechanical engineering, robotics, construction management, criminal justice (including forensics and law enforcement), fire science, physical therapy, wildlife biology, forestry, welding, performance dancing, journalism, automotive repair, culinary arts, and cosmetology.

Of particular note, several students throughout all the focus groups expressed an interest in owning their own businesses. In some cases, the students articulated their interest in a business that was also associated with an industry that is important in their regions (e.g., restaurant, forestry, agriculture, construction, automotive repair).

Most of the high school focus groups included students who exhibited awareness that post-secondary education or training would be necessary to pursue many types of careers in the future, and at two of these high schools, a majority of students in the focus groups described their interests and plans for attending a four-year university, community

college or technical institute immediately after high school (HS-1, HS-2, HS-3, HS-4, and HS-7).

Middle school focus group students were admittedly less aware of educational or training requirements for the different career ideas they described. Some of their occupational interests included physical therapy, chiropractic therapy, veterinarian medicine, paramedics, dentistry, law, pediatrics, computer engineering, architecture, psychology, professional sports (football, soccer, and tennis), electrical engineering, fashion design, food service (café owner), medical technician, pyrotechnics, and performance music. It was observed at the middle school level that, in their responses to this inquiry, students were influenced by their parents, books, television, or in a few instances, by the responses of their classmates regarding career interests.

In evaluating the student focus group discussions, a pattern emerged regarding students' understanding of possible career opportunities, the state and local economies, and their expectations for the future. In this study, the focus group discussions that occurred at high schools where career exploration or development programs were more intensive and involved hands-on, project-based learning and opportunities for interaction with local business and industry revealed greater level of student awareness, motivation and enthusiasm about completing high school, and in most cases, about progressing toward post-secondary education and training in a particular career field. Student focus group discussions at comprehensive high schools with an emphasis on university a-g requirements revealed greater student awareness and interest about continuing their general education at a four year college or university or community college with an intention of subsequently choosing a career field (HS-1 and HS-2).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STUDENTS**

Each of the focus groups was asked to describe what additional information and services students would need to assist them in planning for their futures. At the middle school level, focus group students discussed wanting more opportunity for hands-on learning, more electives, more information about what jobs were available in the local community and what skills and classes were necessary for careers of interest, as well as what scholarships were available.

High school focus group students commented that methods for measuring aptitude and career interest should be improved and should begin at an earlier grade and continue each year throughout high school as students develop and mature. Students expressed wanting additional time to enroll in electives as well as more choices for various electives (such as a “wheel of life” class) that would provide more hands-on learning opportunities, additional job shadowing and internship opportunities in different types of businesses or industries, assistance with resume writing, additional guest speakers for presentations that would be available to all students, and more field trips to industry sites.

All student focus groups also indicated wanting more information related to salaries and employment projections. While most student focus groups reported that teachers were the main source of information, encouragement, and motivation in terms of exploration of



career possibilities, many students also wanted more opportunity to consult with counselors on a more frequent basis. Students would like more advice from counselors regarding costs and resources needed to obtain the training and education for possible careers and more advice on colleges or training for specific fields. There were two focus groups of students who indicated that their schools provided satisfactory information that was combined with adequate preparation activities to allow students to discover career options and continued educational requirements vis-à-vis the efforts of their teachers (HS-4 and HS-9).\*

The student focus groups convened at the comprehensive high schools discussed that their schools' emphasis on graduation requirements and college admissions was so strong that students take primarily college preparatory classes that meet the university a-g requirements. Consequently, students at these sites felt they did not have enough time in their class schedules to take electives, explore career possibilities, or seek work experience in a career field of interest during the school term (HS-2). Where applicable, students agreed that the career pathways system was mostly beneficial, but somewhat less valuable when the scope of choices was too limited or if courses did not meet college admissions standards. One focus group at a high school with small learning communities felt that the policy of placing students in a four-year learning program in grade nine and not allowing a student to change programs was too restrictive for students. The focus group felt that when a student is not interested in the program emphasis, the student may become discouraged and lack the motivation to continue with high school (HS-5). Students in focus groups at these sites recommended that schools provide grade eight middle school students with better information about an academy or learning community and also allow schedule changes.

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\* These schools include an alternative school with a career and technical education focus and a small comprehensive high school.



# Teacher Focus Groups

## SUMMARY

The following chapter describes focus group discussions with teachers convened at three middle schools and at nine high schools to learn their perspectives regarding the opportunities for students to access activities, programs, or tools for career exploration and orientation of future career options given their regional and statewide economies. In response to questions and discussion prompts, the teachers described the various programs offered or other efforts made at their schools to provide students with career awareness education. The findings from these focus groups were based upon the teachers' individual comments as well as the overarching themes that emerged across all of the teacher focus group discussions. This summary will briefly refer to these themes, and the sections below provide additional context.

The three middle school focus groups consisted of four or five teachers (including two literary coaches) employed at each focus group school, for a total of 13 educators at the middle schools. At the high school level, focus groups consisted of no fewer than three and no more than eight teachers employed at a given focus group site for a total of 50 high school teachers. All references herein to the terms "teacher" or "teachers" relate only to those who participated in the focus groups at the selected school sites and are not meant to include other teachers employed at the focus group school sites or teachers employed at other public schools.

This summary and the report that follows it are intended to supplement and provide context to the data collected through the Careers Project middle and high school principal and counselor survey. In general, the teacher focus group phase of this study revealed that:

- Although each of the nine high school teacher focus groups reported the availability of some career development curriculum, there were significantly different levels of emphasis on formal, schoolwide career exploration and development course offerings and participation opportunities for all students. For example, teachers at the magnet, charter, and alternative high schools with an emphasis on CTE provided all students with intensive career exploration and development programs that involved hands-on, project-based learning activities. These learning activities were combined with opportunities to interact with local businesses and industries and provided all students with instructional information about jobs and careers as a matter of priority and according to their schools' stated objectives and missions. Teachers collaborated with one another to integrate and share course objectives between academic departments. They understood and agreed with the policy of their school board and principal that educational services for grades nine through 12 should combine instruction on basic skills along with technical skills and career awareness to promote

progressive skill development in at least one career field. Alternatively, at the six high schools with comprehensive academic programs (each of which had one or more California Partnership Academy, Career Pathway, Regional Occupation Program elective, or small learning community), the focus group teachers were aware that some faculty members offered some career exploration curriculum for students enrolled in specific electives courses. At two of these comprehensive high schools, focus group teachers also described a schoolwide career exploration program wherein *all* students were required to present an independent career exploration research project, to attend specific, grade-level career development activities, and to complete job shadowing and internship hours required for graduation credit.

- Teachers participating in the middle school focus groups did not offer any formal career exploration or career development curriculum for their students. Teachers stated that instruction for basic skills proficiency in reading, writing, and arithmetic was the primary focus of the curriculum; however, a few of the middle school teachers admitted that, on a very limited and occasional basis, they might embed career exploration information or include a brief activity in basic lessons. Each of the middle school teacher focus groups exhibited a preference for providing students with some level of career exploration curriculum, but each group indicated a lack of formal planning or other official mechanism at the district and administrative level for this type of coursework.
- To the extent that teachers were willing to speculate on their local governing board's and principal's views regarding compliance with state law, they expressed general agreement with the programs or curricula offered at their school.\* For example, participating teachers convened at the middle schools were focused on improving students' basic academic skills in preparation for high school, which was in accordance with the objectives of their principal and school board for addressing students' academic achievement and high school dropout rates. Similarly, teachers at the comprehensive high schools generally were more focused on preparing all students for graduation with an emphasis on pursuing post-secondary education options, which were the reported objectives of the parents in their community and of their district's school board. Furthermore, teachers at the high schools with emphasis on CTE developed curriculum according to the objectives of their school board(s). For example, they prepared students for high school graduation while introducing hands-on work experience opportunities and assisting them with post-secondary educational and future career goals.
- Teacher consensus was noted regarding the impact of their schools' daily schedule. At sites with block schedules, teachers believed the extended class period was beneficial because it allowed for greater flexibility to plan project-based lessons,

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\* Education Code §15228(b) regarding provisions for “a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry level employment skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school.”

permitted time for students to participate in job shadowing, internships, or mentoring programs, was conducive to coordinating guest speaker presentations and field trips, and promoted positive relationships given their opportunity to spend more time with each student. On the other hand, teachers at sites using traditional 50- to 60-minute class periods indicated that the bell schedule had little or no affect on their capacity to offer students with activities or curriculum for career exploration and development.

- Teachers' rating of the usefulness of career exploration activities in terms of raising student awareness about career opportunities was highest among those focus group sites with an emphasis on career technical education. The usefulness of career exploration activities in providing information to students about local and statewide career opportunities was rated somewhat lower overall by most of the teacher focus groups than their rating for usefulness in for raising student awareness.
- Many of the high school teacher focus groups discussed the value that students gain from career exploratory or development programs for refining their career interests. Some teachers expressed the opinion that the programs were "key to turning on the lights for students."
- In schools where career exploration tools were utilized by students, many teachers indicated a relatively high rating for usefulness in raising student awareness and in providing information to help students decide where to begin career exploration.
- Teachers agreed that providing students with economic information and opportunities to interact with businesses and industries resulted in students' improved understanding about the relevance of their education and the value of earning a high school diploma in order to continue their education and training for a career pathway. Furthermore, many teachers concurred that while creating and maintaining partnerships with local business and industry is very time consuming for faculty and administration, the investment was important to their schools' capacity to offer all students with meaningful career and technical educational opportunities. This sentiment was particularly noted among schools whose objectives and missions included career education for students.
- In discussing barriers that impede students' access to career exploratory or development services, some teachers also expressed a perceived lack of interest from local business or industry to get involved in their schools, or the low socio-economic condition of the neighborhood in which their schools were located did not provide opportunities for their students. Some teachers commented on the lack of students' qualifications academically or behaviorally (language, reading and math proficiency, communication skills, or criminal records) or students' responsibilities at home that prevent them from participating fully in career services offered at their schools.
- General recommendations from teachers with regard to career exploration and development related primarily to the importance of providing students with various options for educational development by incorporating concrete assignments into their

curriculum, expanding their program selection, or allowing students to take courses at neighboring high schools or community colleges to augment their school's offerings.

- Other teacher recommendations related to garnering funding to enable schools to initiate or provide additional funding for career-oriented services.

The following sections elaborate in more detail the findings of the research team based upon discussions with focus group teachers at each of the three middle schools and nine high schools selected for this study.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS FOR CAREER OPTIONS**

The following section describes the perspectives of teachers with regard to the availability of resources for students in grades seven through 12 to explore career options and prepare for career development. Teacher focus group questions and discussion topics related to the means for curriculum development, school board and administrative views, and other factors such as class schedule. In addition, teacher focus groups were asked to describe and discuss the extent and usefulness of available activities, programs, and tools that allow all students to explore career options, as well as any barriers that impede student access and opportunity for career exploration or development. Finally, teachers provided some suggestions to assist them in providing career development services in their schools.

### **Curriculum Development for Career Development; Local School Board and Administrative Views; and Master School Schedule**

#### ***Curriculum Development for Career Development; Local School Board and Administrative Views***

The moderator queried each teacher focus group whether they as faculty teachers or any other staff members at their school had developed or adopted a curriculum for career development, and if so, teachers were asked to describe the curriculum and indicate if it is shared or coordinated among staff or articulated with other feeder schools. The moderator also inquired whether adopted curriculum was developed by their district or county office of education and if any career and technical education (CTE) courses had been aligned to state standards and frameworks. In addition, the moderator asked teachers to share their own understanding and any knowledge of their school boards' and school principals' views regarding compliance with Education Code § 51228(b).\*

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\* Education Code § 51228 (b) “. . . requires local governing boards of schools serving students in grades seven to 12 to offer a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry level skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school.”

Although each of the nine high school teacher focus groups reported the availability of some career development curriculum, there were significantly different levels of emphasis on formal, schoolwide course offerings and participation opportunities for all students. For example, teachers at three of nine high school focus groups reported providing all students with information about jobs and careers as a matter of priority and as a stated objective of the school's mission (HS-3, HS-4, and HS-8). These teachers discussed comparatively intensive programs and curriculum that included career exploration as well as varying levels of skills development and training in career fields.

One such example of an intensive curriculum for career development was described by teachers at a urban, magnet high school serving grades nine through 12 (HS-4). The teacher focus group indicated that development of the curriculum was based on combining vocational education with university a-g requirements. Guided by the site's vision statement for Expected Statewide Learning Results (ESLRs), the context of the curriculum was based on careers in the construction trade or management, architecture, and engineering with emphasis on preparing students for high school graduation and entry to college, apprenticeship programs, or the workforce. Focus group teachers stated that course content is aligned with both state CTE standards and with building and construction industry standards. The teachers described the curriculum as rigorous and integrated across subject matter and grade level. Coordination had been recently established with the local middle school for a robotics course, and articulation agreements were in place with the two local community colleges for construction and building trade apprenticeship programs. Teachers indicated that many graduating students were eligible for college scholarships and were recruited for admission to the California State University's (CSU) construction management bachelor's degree program. Industry involvement was an integral component of this school's curriculum development, from an advisory capacity for project-based learning to participation in a jury panel to judge student presentations with either a "thumbs up or down" evaluation rubric.

A second intensive example of career development was depicted by teachers at an urban alternative high school (HS-8). Teachers in this focus group represented three of the four academies offered at this school (which include Technology, Health, Automotive and a freshman academy). They described a thematic curriculum for grades nine through 12 that integrated CTE standards with core subject areas based on the California Department of Education's *CTE Online* guidelines as well as other integration methods for project-based learning assessments. Teachers reported that curriculum was shared among staff within each academy. Many of the courses offered by the Health Academy were articulated with the local community college, and efforts were ongoing to expand the partnership with the college for articulation in other courses. Focus group teachers explained that all seniors were required to create a career development portfolio, which was integrated with standards for grade 12 English and included a research report related to a career path, a business letter and resume, letters of recommendation, and a capstone project designed to benefit or educate fellow classmates and the community. Seniors annually present their portfolio projects to middle school students who are invited to visit the campus. Portfolio completion is required for graduation.

A third example of an intensive career development program was encountered at a suburban charter high school that provides career and technical education for grades 11 and 12 only (HS-3). Focus group teachers at this site explained that several of them had served as committee members in the late 1990s to establish the school's project-based, interdisciplinary and career-focused curricula when the school's programs were being developed through the collaborative efforts and agreements of two adjacent school districts and local business organizations. The school serves students from both districts in three-hour blocks. Students choose from 16 career-focused labs, and most course offerings were aligned with state CTE standards and accredited through the local Regional Occupational Program (ROP). Many courses offered were also approved by the University of California (UC) and the CSU as meeting admission requirements, and the computer technology courses were articulated with the local community college. Each lab has multiple teachers, and the curricula are coordinated and shared by the faculty. Financial contributions from local and regional sponsors benefited the school's labs.

These three particular teacher focus groups each reported their understanding of their school board's and principal's views regarding compliance of Education Code §51228(b) to include providing students with educational services that have "real world relevance," "a combination of basic skills, career awareness and technical education programs," and which "promote progressive skill development in at least one career field."

Teachers who participated in focus groups at two comprehensive high schools also described progressive, schoolwide programs for career development. The first was located at a comprehensive high school of 2,750 students, described as a "School to Careers" program which offers 16 "career pathways," each of which includes four to six core academic courses spanning across all four years of the English and social studies curricula (HS-7). Encouraging all students to "Focus on Your Future," the program requires grade nine students to explore goal setting and the theme "Who Am I?" Grade ten students take interest inventory tests to begin learning about career opportunities based on the theme "What Are My Options?" Continuing with the themes "Where Do I Go from Here?" and "How Am I Going to Get There?" in grades 11 and 12, respectively, students are required to attend a "Connecting to Success" conference for soft-skills training in interviewing, resume writing, and work ethics. Seniors are required to take a career explorations class and complete a final senior project that includes a 45-hour internship and a research project on a career of interest.

Focus group teachers at the site discussed above stated that the school's alliance with Junior Achievement and local business organizations presents an exemplary model that meets and exceeds the State's expectations as outlined in the Education Code § 51228(b). The teachers in this focus group reported schoolwide faculty support of their principal's view that "all students must explore career goals and opportunities in high school in order to develop a plan to pursue post-secondary training or education that will result in a living wage upon graduation from either college or post-secondary training."

The second teacher focus group that described a progressive, schoolwide program for career development was at a rural high school with 183 students; 2007-2008 was the first school year of implementing a "College and Career Pathways" curriculum (HS-9).



Beginning in grade nine with a “BASE” (Building Academic Success Early) project, each student is required to survey and research local and statewide careers and professions. Students develop a “personal learning plan” and select from among seven pathways that offer rigorous, academic standards and project-based curriculum as well as career and college exploration activities, including a junior trip to visit nine different colleges and universities. The senior year requires a research and presentation project for graduation. Teachers reported that coordination with the local elementary school (K-8) is beginning to occur; the school received a grant (promoting professional learning communities) to fund the hiring of substitutes and allow teachers to meet and collaborate on curriculum development. Articulation with the local community college varies by subject and course.

The focus group teachers at this site described the local school board’s view of Education Code § 51228(b) as concentrated on preparing students to have a viable resume upon leaving high school, which includes having a skill set for an entry level job or having qualifications for college admission. Teachers of the second school discussed the difficulties of a small student population and limited facilities as barriers in terms of offering courses in the vocational area while still providing courses to fulfill the university a-g requirements needed for college admission. They discovered a resolution by forming cooperative enrollment partnerships that permitted students to attend courses available at a neighboring district high school, or at one of the two local community colleges.

Another teacher focus group at a suburban high school of 2,450 students revealed a comprehensive program whose curriculum primarily emphasizes the University of California’s a-g admission requirements, but also requires all students to complete ten units of CTE courses including a business technology class (HS-1). Teachers participating in this focus group reported sharing and collaborating their curriculum within departments on an individual basis. The extent that career awareness is included in their curricula is dependent on individual teachers unless the class is offered through a ROP or Partnership Academy program. For example, an English teacher explained how career exploration activities were interwoven in her English curriculum by requiring that expository writing include career and college research and creating a resume and business letter. A grade 12 economics course requires students to create a career portfolio. A Health and Human Services Academy is offered through a California Partnership Academy with curriculum aligned to CTE standards. As to coordinating with feeder schools, focus group teachers at this site reported that department chairs attend steering meetings at the district level; there was also an early outreach to AVID middle school students, and the program “Project Lead the Way” was available.

Focus group teachers at this school stated that their local school board placed a high priority on providing students with career technical education programs, as evidenced by the district’s articulation agreements for courses with a local technical institute and the added high school graduation requirement that students complete ten units of school-to-work education credits.

A teacher focus group at a similarly sized comprehensive suburban high school of nearly 2,500 students stated clearly that the school and community-supported priority is on preparing students for college admission (HS-2). Teachers recited the college-going rate at 97 percent (including 50 percent of students who were bound for the local community college). Teachers also reported that although students were directed to the Internet website *GetInsights.com* for a career counseling profile and that several career-oriented ROP electives were available (several of which meet the UC and CSU “g” elective requirements), there was no schoolwide, comprehensive curriculum for career exploration for all students and, consequently, there were few or no services available for those students who were not college bound. The focus group teachers did report, however, that career orientation may be offered informally during classroom lectures or embedded as brief units in courses offered by individual teachers.

Teachers participating at this focus group site explained their understanding of the school board’s priorities to be primarily on improving students’ test scores with an indirect affect of increasing the local property values.

Teachers at another urban, comprehensive high school of 1,975 students also reported a less formal approach to career development, explaining that the emphasis was on basic skills proficiency (HS-5). According to teachers in this focus group, the curriculum was developed around eight small learning communities or “houses” that students had enrolled in upon leaving middle school. The curricula are not shared across “houses” and there is no schoolwide program for career development. One of the focus group teachers described adopting curricula for a criminal justice program (that includes a Police Officer’s Examination) and developing a forensic science program available to students in that program. Another teacher in this focus group reported introducing biographies of people in the field of science in an effort to inspire students to understand the relevance of regular science class lessons.

Teachers discussed the need to emphasize basic skills because of the lack of preparation of many of their students for placement in math and science at high school level. Given a high percentage of English Learners at this school (36 percent), teachers reported that many students had double-blocked, remedial mathematics and English courses. To assist students, teachers must spend additional time teaching and reviewing the curriculum, which leaves little or no opportunity to provide integrated career exploration or development lessons. Teachers stated that other barriers for implementing career exploration or development relate to the frequency of students transferring out of classes that they felt were too challenging, combined with the high transiency rate of the student population in general. Teachers indicated that this high school accepts many transfer students who have low academic performance or behavioral issues, which further contributes to the school’s academic challenges.

In discussing the school board’s view of the Education Code § 51228(b), the teachers participating in this focus group believed that teaching basic skills, meeting university a-g requirements, and graduating students in four years was the primary emphasis of their school board, as well as a school policy and priority. In further discussions on the topic, this teacher focus group stressed that many students at their school need more time to

learn the coursework, which may require more than four years to graduate from high school.

At a small, comprehensive high school in a rural community, the teacher focus group reported a limited offering of career development courses through the ROP (Virtual Enterprise and Sports and Entertainment Marketing) for students in grades 11 and 12 (HS-6). The adopted curricula for these courses were developed by the County Office of Education and aligned with the state CTE standards. Teachers described efforts to align their courses with the local community colleges and indicated that eligible students may register for college courses offered online via the Internet. Teachers indicated that they do not share or coordinate career exploration or other curricula across departments or with other district schools.

Regarding Education Code § 52118(b), teachers at this site reported agreement with their school board's view that compliance involved providing both basic skills education and preparing students for entry-level employment and higher education.

The teacher focus group discussions described heretofore have occurred at high schools serving grades nine through 12. Three teacher focus groups were also convened at the middle school level with identical questions relating to the nature of curriculum for career development, resources available, and views of the school administration and governing board. Each of the middle school teacher focus groups reported that they had not formally developed, adopted, or shared any type of curriculum for career exploration or development. Each middle school teacher focus group explained their primary focus on providing basic skills curricula and that career development was not considered a priority among the school's student learning objectives.

Most of the middle school teachers agreed that there is not enough time to formally integrate career development with their core curriculum. However, at least one teacher in each group described having embedded lesson units or having had discussions with students to illustrate the connections between middle school education and planning for the future. For example:

- One teacher directed students to research the youth page on the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics' website in order to encourage students to begin thinking about career options (MS-2).
- An English teacher assigned students to report on interviews with persons from different occupations (MS-1).
- A social studies and technology teacher described a research unit that required students to read a biography of a famous, accomplished person and then to construct a resume of their biographical subject (MS-2).
- Other teachers display visual illustrations in their classrooms to show comparisons of various career salaries (MS-3).

- All middle school teachers explained to their students the importance of learning basic skills, having a good attitude, and working hard during middle school in preparation for high school.

Regarding teachers' opinions of their school board's view regarding Education Code § 51822(b), all middle school focus group teachers reported that the primary priority is on preparing students to achieve basic skills and pass standards testing. Coincidentally, the three middle school sites have similar student demographics, with large percentages of low socio-economic status, non-White, and English learner (EL) students who have scored "below basic" and "far below basic" in English Language Arts on the state's standardized tests. The teachers at each of the middle schools felt that their capacity to offer enrichment programs was restricted because of the mandates of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), precluding many students with low test scores from taking other than additional remedial courses.

In addition, as one middle school teacher pointed out, there is no inclusion of career technical or vocational education in the school site or district plan; therefore, the school had no budget for any such programs or activities (MS-2). This particular middle school's facility was originally built to be a visual and performing arts school with dance and music studios, state-of-the-art computer, technology and science labs, a modernized shop and a two-story Library-Media Center. Furthermore, the school and district had acquired 56 computers for student use; however, the district lacked operating funds and the site had no technology support to utilize the equipment to its potential capacity.

Each of the middle school teacher focus groups agreed that career awareness and exploration should be included in their curriculum and embedded within the existing basic skills training vis-à-vis activities such as field trips, guest speakers, and hands-on exercises that would serve to engage middle school students in career exploration. One teacher emphatically stated that, "It's disrespectful if you don't give [all students] an opportunity to experience the broader world, like seeing a factory, for example." Another teacher in the same focus group believed that providing hands-on experiences would eliminate many behavioral problems since the majority of students were kinesthetic learners and need to be engaged physically (MS-2). At another site, a teacher commented that middle school "students have an interest in business but no way to experience it" (MS-1). Focus group teachers at a third site explained that "most students have dreams of occupations but they are often unrealistic" and that teachers want to encourage students to dream, but also want students to base their ideas on an understanding of facts (MS-3).

### ***Master School Schedule***

With regard to other factors that may impact teachers' and schools' ability to provide career exploration opportunities, the moderator asked participating teachers whether class time was based on a traditional master schedule of 55-minute periods, block periods of more time, or a combination of the two schedules (modified block), and whether the master school schedule has any bearing on their schools' ability to provide career development to students. Although this topic was not discussed with two of the high

school focus groups due to lack of time, the overall responses revealed a variety of scheduling methods (HS-1 and HS-2).

For instance, according to the teacher focus groups, one of the middle schools used a block schedule (MS-1), while the two other middle schools utilized a traditional schedule for the general student population with block periods for intensive and remedial courses for English Learners (MS-2 and MS-3). Among the high school teacher focus groups, four used a block schedule (HS-3, HS-4, HS-8, and HS-9). For example, one high school employed a modified block schedule (in which teachers had contact with all their students on Mondays with a block schedule for Wednesday/Friday or Tuesday/Thursday), thereby providing students with instruction three days per week (HS-5). Two other high school teacher focus groups reported a traditional, 55-minute periods (HS-6 and HS-7).

As to the effect of the master school schedule on the ability to provide career development curriculum, teachers in focus groups at both the middle and high schools with block or modified block schedules agreed that their extended class periods allowed for:

- More flexibility with project-based learning.
- Students to work on team projects.
- More time for teachers to identify with each student.
- Student tutorial periods for their personal learning plan requirements.
- Students to job shadow or intern off campus (where applicable at some high schools).

High school teachers also indicated that block periods permit adequate time for scheduling guest speakers and field trips. On the other hand, teachers at the two focus groups with traditional class scheduling did not feel that the one-hour traditional schedule was a considerable factor that restricted their capacity to provide career development curriculum. Of note, however, teachers at one of these sites did report that the Virtual Enterprise ROP course was scheduled as a two-period block of time (HS-6).

### **Evaluation of Career Development Activities, Programs, and Tools**

Each teacher focus group was queried on whether the school offers or organizes career development programs, activities, and tools and whether these services were available:

- To all students including special education and ELs.
- To students who take the initiative to access them.
- As a program or service for students who are not preparing for college admission after high school graduation.

The moderator asked teachers to rate the usefulness of career exploration and development activities, programs, and tools for raising student awareness and providing information about local and statewide career opportunities. Additional evaluative questions regarding teachers' ratings of career development *programs* included whether they (1) provided students with first hand experiences about career opportunities, (2) motivated students to continue their education at the current grade-level and above, and (3) motivated students to take demanding classes and achieve at high levels.

### ***Activities for Career Development***

The moderator defined career exploration activities as including events such as a career day, a college fair, and guest speaker presentations. Middle school teachers participating in the focus groups reported much less and frequent offerings of career exploration activities than their counterparts at the high school level. For example, focus group teachers at one middle school indicated that the only activities included guest speaker presentations organized and coordinated by individual teachers on a limited and occasional basis for specific students (MS-2). Another middle school focus group indicated the activities included an annual career day, a high school recruitment day, and an outreach day hosted by the University at Davis for approximately twenty students (MS-3). The third middle school teacher focus group stated that career exploration activities were offered sporadically by individual teachers such as inviting a guest speaker during a class period. This focus group, however, reported that the afterschool program organizes activities such as guest speaker presentations for students attending the program, which included law enforcement officers and university students (MS-1). One special education teacher pointed out that the special education program allows her more leverage to build a career focus into her students' individual educational plans (IEP) than other teachers have with the general student population (MS-2).

Most of the high school teacher focus groups reported that career development activities such as career days and college fairs occur once a year or biennially and that all students were encouraged to participate. In addition, activities such as guest speaker presentations were offered to all students schoolwide but were often targeted for specific groups of students, based on their grade-level or enrollment in a course of study, career academy, pathway or lab (HS-1, HS-3, HS-4, HS-5, HS-6, and HS-7). Teachers indicated that student attendance may be mandatory in some cases according to the coursework. One teacher focus group referred to a "Brown Bag Speaker Series" offered approximately twice per month by their school's career center, which presents representatives of local businesses at lunch time for all students to attend voluntarily (HS-2). Two other teacher focus groups reported a schoolwide approach to offering guest speaker events which include all students (HS-8 and HS-9).

Teachers' rating of the usefulness of career exploration activities in terms of raising student awareness about career opportunities on a scale of 1 to 5 (most useful) was highest among those focus groups sites with an emphasis on career technical education. Among all responding teacher focus groups, however, some positive comments revealed that when offered schoolwide career day was the most useful activity for raising awareness among the greatest number of students (HS-6).

The usefulness of career exploration activities in providing information to students about local and statewide career opportunities was rated somewhat lower overall by most of the teacher focus groups than their rating for usefulness for raising student awareness. Teacher focus group discussions indicated that although information may be provided to students, it may not relate to students' interests, it may not be specific enough to be usefully received by them, or it often is offered without appropriate follow up lessons or debriefing activities. Specific teacher comments included:

- Only those students who were interested and engaged at the time would receive and process the information (HS-5).
- The information may be more general than specific as to local and statewide opportunities (HS-8).
- There is no value in giving young children information without focused follow-up activities (MS-1).
- Information on a broader variety of occupations, in addition to the public safety careers that are typically represented, would be more useful to students (MS-3).

### ***Programs for Career Development***

Each teacher focus group discussed programs offered to students to explore or develop their career options. Programs were defined as mentoring or job-shadowing, work-based learning, career technical education programs such as Partnership Academy or Tech Prep programs. Teacher focus groups at the middle school level indicated that career development programs were not offered at their school. However, each of the high school teacher focus groups offered some career technical education program (consisting of at least one ROP elective course or at least one Partnership Academy program). In addition, nearly all of the high school teacher focus groups reported that job shadowing and mentoring programs were available to all students and, at some sites these programs were mandatory for all students. Teachers among several focus groups commented on the importance that students, prior to participating in career exploration programs such as job shadowing and internships, exhibit some emotional maturity and basic proficiency in the “soft skills” necessary for interacting with business representatives in the community (such as punctuality, appropriate verbal and written communications skills, and appropriate attire). One teacher focus group described a grade level, age-related curriculum that prompts students to self-evaluate, to set academic goals, and to research career options of interest in preparation for job shadowing opportunities in grade 11 for required internship hours in grade 12 (HS-7).

Nearly all of the high school teacher focus groups rated the career exploration programs at their sites on a scale of one to five (very useful) for raising student awareness, providing information and first hand experience regarding career options, as well as for

motivating students to study at their current grade-level and above. \* Some teachers expressed the opinion that the programs were “key to turning on the lights for students.” In terms of motivating students, one teacher focus group agreed that “the programs and project-based learning can turn students around and motivate them to work harder and to achieve more because they begin to understand the relevance of their education” (HS-3).

All of the high school teacher focus groups discussed the value that students gain from these programs for refining their career interests. Teachers indicated that students were either motivated to continue their education in a field offered through a program or they realized that they were not interested in or suited to a field they had initially selected and they would explore other options. In addition, one teacher focus group, in discussing the usefulness of these programs for motivating students to perform at grade-level or above, noted that regardless of existing programs, it is often teachers’ “personal, individual interest that keeps students coming to school; the personal connection with teachers and counselors is a motivating factor” (HS-5).

### ***Career Exploration Tools***

The moderator asked participating teachers to describe career exploration tools (defined to include diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventory surveys) designed to help students explore their interests or what they might like to do for a job or career. Each middle school teacher focus group reported that there were no such tools available schoolwide for their students. Middle school teachers at one site, however, indicated the possibility that individual teachers may offer access to interest inventory surveys or programs (MS-1), and another middle school focus group advised that tools were available for special education students only (MS-2).

Conversely, most high school teacher focus groups indicated that their school provided students with access to the Internet and to online self-assessment and interest inventory surveys through *Bridges.com Choices Explorer and Planner*, *CareerCruising.com*, *GetInsights.com*, *Naviance.com*, or *coinedu.com* (HS-2, HS-3, HS-4, HS-6, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9).<sup>†</sup> The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) Career Exploration Program was also offered at many of the focus groups sites. According to the discussions with some of the teacher focus groups, students were instructed to take the self-assessment tests or interest inventories as part of a schoolwide, school-to-work preparation beginning either in grade nine (HS-8 and HS-9) or grade ten (HS-7). At other sites, the teacher focus groups reported that individual teachers encouraged students to access the tools throughout their high school years as part of ongoing, grade-level research activities (HS-2, HS-3, and HS-4). One teacher focus group indicated that tools were available to all students, but accessed primarily by students enrolled in ROP courses

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\* The rating of career exploration programs was not discussed with one high school teacher focus group due to the expiration of time.

<sup>†</sup> This topic was not discussed with one high school teacher focus group due to lack of time (HS-1).



(HS-6). One high school teacher focus group indicated that career exploration tools (other than general Internet access) had not been available to students since the expiration of the school's user license for a web-based software program (HS-5).

In schools where career exploration tools were utilized by students, the moderator further probed participating high school teachers to consider and rate the usefulness of career exploration tools in raising student awareness and providing students with information about local and statewide career opportunities on a scale of one to five (very useful). Many teachers indicated a four to five rating for usefulness in raising student awareness and in providing information to help students decide where to begin career exploration. Focus group teachers commented that:

- Diagnostic and aptitude tests are a good place for students to begin the exploration process (HS-6).
- The information often prompts an 'Ah-Ha' moment for students (HS-8).
- Once students have taken the interest survey, they can look into what colleges to consider (HS-2).

### ***Provision of Career Development to All Students***

Among all of the teacher focus groups, there was a consensus of opinions in response to the question regarding whether career exploration or development programs, activities, and tools were available to all students or viewed as provisional only for students who were or who were not going to college. Teachers at all sites agreed that all students were encouraged to pursue post-secondary education or training and that all students would benefit from career development counseling whether they were college bound or otherwise. The middle school teacher focus groups noted that at grades seven and eight, it is too early to make an assumption about whether or not students were college bound. Teachers in most of the focus groups recommended providing some career development counseling at the middle school level given that most of these students had no knowledge or understanding about possible career options. According to the focus group teachers, the scope of the middle schools is to prepare students for courses at the high school level, and it would be relevant to offer middle school students career exploration and self-assessment tools to encourage them to begin planning for their future.

At the high school level, teacher focus groups also agreed that career exploration and development is important for all students. Some of the teacher focus groups shared the opinion that the increased emphasis upon preparing all students to meet the university a-g requirements had resulted in the diminishing value of career exploration and development programs or services. For example, teachers at one high school reported that all "science and math curriculum had been brought up to the college-prep level" yet a majority of students at their school intended to pursue an associate of arts degree at a community college after high school (HS-5). Another focus group of teachers discussed their support of the school's mandate that all students comply with the school's career exploration requirements. Teachers at this site reportedly assist students' efforts to achieve the a-g

requirements by integrating their Career Pathways program and embedding assignments with the core curriculum for English, social studies, math, and science (HS-7).

Among the teacher focus groups at high schools with emphasis on CTE, teachers agreed that “career exploration is viewed as opening doors for all students.” Teachers at these schools discussed the value of providing all students with career counseling, commenting that “all freshmen and sophomores are considered to be college-bound; however, by the junior year, if students were not university a-g compliant, redirection may occur” to ensure that students have considered options for post-secondary education, including community college or further career technical training.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS TO CALIFORNIA’S OVERALL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES**

Each of the twelve teacher focus groups was asked to discuss whether:

- Resources are provided to students regarding the variety of careers and associated skills and salaries; and
- Their school engages with local business or community organizations to promote student awareness and orientation of the regional and state economies.

In conjunction with the latter, teacher focus groups were asked to describe their schools’ processes for developing relationships or partnerships with local businesses or community organizations and to discuss opinions about potential benefits to students from the schools’ involvement with local businesses or community organizations.

### **Provision of Economic and Employment Information**

The majority of high school teacher focus groups indicated that students were responsible for obtaining their own information on salaries and job outlook as part of a required research report or presentation. Teacher focus groups reported methods for administering the assignments to students as follows:

- Students must produce a six to seven page report on jobs or careers of interest in California and within the local region (HS-1).
- Students partake in an interest inventory survey in grade ten and research salaries and expected growth for a jobs or careers of interest (HS-2).
- Students are assigned individual career research projects to explore and report on a career description, forecasted market, education and skills requirements, and salaries (HS-3).
- Students participate in a senior exhibition that displays their research of a career pathway including salaries, benefits, promotional opportunities and union or non-union affiliation (HS-4).

- Students submit written analysis of a particular trade which includes telephone interviews with tradesmen; other projects are required at each grade-level (HS-5).
- Information is directed to students through individual research assignments to report on a career description, history, salary, educational, and skill requirements (HS-7).
- Students in each academy are required to complete career exploration research assignments, make presentations to other students, and complete a capstone project that promotes cross-training and introduction to all career areas offered at the school (HS-8).
- Students are required to complete career exploration research as part of a computer applications program and to create a Power Point presentation that includes job outlook, requirements for training and education, location of jobs, and an illustration of the importance of a job to the economy (HS-9).

Focus group teachers at several high school sites reported providing students with Internet access to research salary and job information either through life skills, economics, ROP classes, or the school's career center (where available). Focus group teachers at schools with emphasis on CTE discussed the "importance of showing various occupations so that students can learn different options rather than what they may only know through their family surroundings and environment."

Only one middle school teacher focus group reported offering some job outlook or salary information to its students through different venues. For example, the participants described how information is available through the school library. One ELD teacher reportedly offered her EL students with information by distributing brochures regarding different vocational career training offered through the adult education program. A computer applications teacher described a student assignment to research and report on a career field, which includes completing a job application and producing an informational video about their selected career (MS-2).

Most of the teacher focus groups were presented with examples of an economic analysis that provided information regarding the fastest growing and largest employing jobs in several industry sectors including corresponding skills and salaries. Focus group teachers were asked to discuss their opinions regarding the information. Comments among teachers in all focus groups revealed consensus that the economic analysis "would be a great way to teach relevance;" "would benefit students in revealing to them the educational requirements" of specific career fields; and "would provide students with concrete information to help them connect the skills that are required in different occupations." One middle school teacher focus group suggested that the information would be useful to incorporate into booklets for distribution to students in their homerooms (MS-1).

### **Engaging with Local Business and Community Organizations**

To gain a perspective on the extent to which students were provided with resources to orient them to local, regional or the state economies, most of the teacher focus groups were queried about how their schools engage with local business or community

organizations in terms of promoting students' career development.\* None of the focus group teachers at the three middle schools had any involvement with their local business community or a community organization. However, teachers at seven of the nine high school sites indicated that their schools work with a ROP advisory group or participate as members of a local chamber of commerce, business alliance, or industry association (HS-3, HS-4, HS-5, HS-6, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). These seven teacher focus groups indicate that their schools' administrative staff communicates and networks with local businesses to recruit participation of representatives for career day activities and internship programs. Many of these focus group teachers also network, recruit, and maintain connections with industry representatives themselves to coordinate guest speaker presentations, student mentoring, job shadowing, and field trips for students.

The focus group teachers explained that connections with business representatives occur either by referral or through a teacher's personal contacts and were chosen according to a specific field of study or lab curriculum. One teacher focus group advised that the local rotary club was very active in the school's community. Two of the high school teacher focus groups explained that the business community participated as judges and were invited guests for an annual senior presentation of the students' final careers exploration projects (HS-4 and HS-7). In addition, teachers at one of these high schools informed the CRB research team that businesses sponsor an annual "Connecting to Success" conference that is mandatory for attendance by students in grade 11 (HS-7). Another teacher focus group pointed out that business assisted with developing the vertical articulation agreement with the community advisory board for the community college (HS-9).

Several of the teacher focus groups where schools engage with local business were of the opinion that such efforts are very beneficial to students for providing guest speaker events, mentoring, job shadowing, and internship opportunities as well as securing financial contributions from business for purchasing equipment and material that are vital to enhancing the schools' curriculum (HS-3, HS-4, HS-5, HS-6, HS-8, and HS-9). Although three of the groups did not discuss this topic due to the expiration of focus group time (HS-1, HS-2, and HS-7), the other groups offered the following list of important outcomes related to school-business alliances:

- Efforts to engage the business community benefit students by providing guest speakers, job shadowing and internship opportunities, as well as by securing financial contributions from business for equipment and materials (HS-3).
- Working with business promotes teachers' understanding of how to bring real-world applications to the curriculum (HS-3).
- Relationships with business have resulted in contributions of money, materials, time, and industry expertise (HS-4).

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\* Two teacher focus groups did not discuss this topic due to lack of time (HS-1, HS-2).

- For a small percentage of students, the relationship with local business organizations has been beneficial (HS-5).
- Students' grades show improvement when they have regular teacher and adult role models involved in their lives (HS-6).
- Relationships with business provide excellent motivation for students and teachers; everyone works and supports each other to achieve at higher levels (HS-8).
- Working with the rotary club facilitates the school's efforts to meet expectations of business (HS-9).

## **PERSPECTIVES ON BARRIERS THAT IMPEDE ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

The moderator asked teacher focus groups whose schools' offering of career exploration services and engagement with businesses was limited or restricted to discuss the barriers and what might be done to mitigate them. At the middle school level, one teacher focus group reported that although their school partners with local universities to facilitate after school and weekend programs, engaging with business is largely "irrelevant to the population of middle school" in terms of recruiting business for job shadowing or mentoring programs (MS-1). This same group of middle school teachers discussed the lack of interest among potential local businesses or community partners.

Two high school teacher focus groups noted that the level of engagement with business is limited, intermittent, and only beneficial to a small percentage of students, which they attributed to the low socio-economic condition of the neighborhood in which their schools were located (HS-5 and HS-6). Teachers at one site discussed the school's location in an "inner city community," together with a high student transiency rate, as factors that precluded the school from partnering with businesses more actively (HS-5). However, teachers expressed confidence that an impending urban renewal of the local community would help change the culture, and they expected it to bring more opportunities to partner with businesses (HS-5).

Other impediments discussed by the focus group teachers related to students' lack of qualifications academically and behaviorally in terms of language, reading and math proficiency, communications skills, or even criminal records. Furthermore, one teacher described that some students were at times conflicted between their responsibilities at home (i.e., helping to take care of family members) and their desire to participate in school-related extracurricular activities (HS-5).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TEACHERS**

As a final topic, the moderator prompted focus group teachers to discuss the kinds of programs, activities, and tools they believe should be provided to enable students to learn more about the careers available in their local area or statewide. Teachers were also asked to consider how to begin providing the recommended programs, activities, and

tools. General recommendations from teachers with regard to career exploration and development relate primarily to the importance of providing students with various options for educational development by incorporating concrete assignments into their curriculum, expanding their program selection, or allowing students to take courses at neighboring high schools or community colleges to augment their school's offerings. Other teacher recommendations related to garnering seed funding to enable schools to initiate or provide additional funding for career-oriented services. Responding teacher focus groups provided these specific recommendations:

- Incorporate career exploration programs and activities into the homeroom period using English by tying it to expository and persuasive writing assignments (MS-1).
- Provide students with ongoing, hands-on activities structured to meet standards and promote self-assessment; include "I-projects" for career exploration ("Who am I," etc.); gain resources and commitment from the school and district to support exploratory learning such as mentoring, field trips, and guest speakers, which is built into the school site and district planning process (MS-2).
- Provide a district-wide vocational test. Shift the focus from telling students what to do, to asking them what they need. Emphasize to students that they are learning job skills in all class activities and learning the skills necessary to become successful, contributing members of society who will have jobs as adults. Teachers must more frequently articulate that all things taught at school (in English class, for example) involve skills needed in the workplace (i.e., reading, writing, listening, critical thinking, and analysis) (HS-2).
- Present various options for students' educational development. Important factors to the success of a program include a customized facility, a supportive staff that believes in and supports the curriculum design, strong administrative leadership, partnerships and relationships with local businesses, and a successful recruitment program (HS-3).
- Provide curriculum designed to require students to engage in the learning process rather than it being handed to them (HS-3).
- Secure funding through partnership grants for career classes that will give students a variety of directions to explore (HS-5).
- Permit students to attend their local community college at a younger age for more hands-on, vocational opportunities, which are not offered at their high school (HS-5).
- Secure financial support to develop and implement programs, activities, and tools; restructure the small learning communities to better suit student interest; expand the AVID program; promote small learning communities to better connect with students and teach goal setting (HS-5).
- Organize a career day with a more inclusive and varied line up of guest speakers and presenters, including local businesses and government representatives; expand current ROP courses to create academies (e.g., expand the medical terminology course into a medical academy) (HS-6).

- Continue looking at what new or additional classes or academies should be offered. For example, our alternative high school is co-located with a preschool program. We could offer a program to interface with that. We hold collaborative staff development meetings once per month and an annual self-evaluation meeting to assess our program success (HS-8).
- Use grant funding to provide seed money for the development of career pathways; secure ROP and CTE funds to develop specialized programs for career development (HS-9).





# Counselor Focus Groups

## SUMMARY

The following chapter describes focus group discussions with guidance counselors convened at two middle schools and at nine high schools to learn the perspectives of counselors regarding the opportunities students have to access activities, programs, or tools for career exploration and orientation of future career options given their regional and statewide economies. In response to questions and discussion prompts, the counselors described the various programs offered or other efforts made at their schools to provide students with career awareness education. The findings from these focus groups are based upon the counselors' individual comments as well as the overarching themes that emerged across all of the counselor focus group discussions. This summary will briefly refer to these themes, and the sections below provide additional context.

The two middle school focus groups consisted of two counselors each. At the high school level, seven focus groups convened with two to six counselors, and an interview was conducted with a single counselor at two school sites, for a total of 27 encounters with high school counselors. All references herein to the terms “guidance counselors” or “school counselors” relate only to those who participated in the focus groups or interviews at the selected focus group school sites and are not meant to include other counselors employed at the focus group schools or counselors employed at any other public schools.

This summary and the report that follows it are intended to supplement and provide context to the data collected through the Careers Project middle and high school principal and counselor survey. In general, the counselor focus group phase of this study revealed that:

- Counselors at each of the middle and high schools visited had a significantly high student-to-counselor caseload ratio. Counselors were often assigned to groups of students by an alphabetical distribution or on the basis of service domain needs (i.e., special education students, English Learners, at-risk students, students with attendance and behavior issues, etc.).
- Several school counselor groups cited various benefits of having received AB 1802 funds, including the increase of counseling staff thereby reducing their student caseloads, the expansion of services, or the provision of intervention guidance and remedial coursework for students at risk of not graduating from high school due to their inability to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) or required courses.

- Counselors described the need to focus on students' progress toward meeting promotion and graduation requirements as a barrier which had precluded them from providing career guidance to all students. In addition to academic needs, middle school counselors also noted that students' social, emotional, and health needs often required their attention, which decreased time for guidance in other areas. Several high school counselors agreed that inadequate staffing to serve large numbers of students, combined with a priority on improving achievement test scores and graduation rates were significant obstacles to providing career guidance.
- While six of the counselor groups reported the benefit of using a block or modified block class schedule for providing career development services to their students, counselors at three schools employing a traditional schedule of 55-minute class periods indicated that this did not affect their school's ability to offer career exploration and development services.
- When asked to share their opinions on the views of their local school board, their school administrator, and their own views as counselors in terms of meeting the objectives of state law, counselors' opinions reflected the programs or curriculum offered at their schools as defined by their schools' objectives and missions.\*
- Curriculum, activities, programs, or tools for career guidance generally were not coordinated or offered by high school guidance counselors; these counselors verified that students most often receive career information from teachers according to their coursework. Middle school counselors reported that minimal career exploration services were offered to their students.
- Counselors generally considered career exploration activities, programs, and tools to be useful for raising student awareness and for providing students with information about career options, to the extent that students are interested in participating or where they were required. With regard to tools for career guidance, some counselors found it useful to introduce a dialog with students using the students' web-based aptitude assessment results to prompt them to explore and research career options.
- School counselors generally reported encouraging parents to play an active role. About half of the counselor focus groups reported a strong parent component while others indicated low to moderate parental participation in their children's career development activities. Counselors also emphasized the importance for students to become independent in the planning process for their own future career goals.
- Some counselor focus groups noted that economic information regarding the state and regional economies is provided to students as part of their web-based interest

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\* Education Code § 51228 (b) “. . . requires local governing boards of schools serving students in grades seven to 12 to offer a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry level employment skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school.”

inventory surveys, while others stated that information is obtained by students as they complete individual Internet research assignments on career fields. Counselors agreed that students would become motivated and would realize the relevance of their education if they were provided with information about employment trends and if they were given the opportunity to observe how specific academic skills are associated with different occupations.

- Most of the counselor focus groups confirmed that their schools had engaged with local businesses and community organizations to varying degrees of intensity to provide students with job shadowing, mentoring, work experience, or other training opportunities. Counselors, at high schools with business or community involvement, believed that their students had benefitted from the expanded opportunities and material resources that resulted from the partnerships with business.
- Counselors described some obstacles to providing career development services for all students that included students' course enrollment or availability because of students' age, grade, or academic performance. In addition, counselors at one high school indicated that since the school and community culture emphasized college readiness, counselors and teachers were expected to provide information primarily relating to the application and admissions requirements of colleges and universities, which precluded them from offering career guidance.
- Counselors agreed that a comprehensive curriculum for career exploration should include resources for students to assess aptitude and to develop hands-on work experiences. Counselors also agreed that schools must raise public awareness and interest regarding career education in order to obtain a vested commitment and financial support from the business community and to recruit support from school administrators as well as qualified personnel to serve as educators.

The following sections elaborate on the research team's findings based upon discussions with focus group counselors at each of the three middle schools and the nine high schools selected for this study.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS FOR CAREER OPTIONS**

This section reports the perspectives of guidance counselors serving grades seven through 12 at the school focus group sites with regard to the availability of resources that promote student preparation for career exploration and development.<sup>\*</sup> The focus group questions and discussion topics relate to curriculum development, administrative and school board views, and other factors such as parent participation and communication. In addition, the

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<sup>\*</sup> One middle school was unable to release its school counselors from their duties to participate in a focus group.

moderator asked participating counselors to describe the extent and usefulness of activities, programs, and tools available for students to explore career options, as well as any barriers that would impede student access to career exploration opportunities, where appropriate to discuss.

## **Guidance Counseling**

### ***Caseload Ratios and Assembly Bill 1802 Funding***

All of the schools visited had at least one guidance counselor available to students. Each of the counselor focus groups were first asked to estimate their student caseload ratio, which varied both from school to school and among counselors at each site. Many of the focus group counselors had high caseload ratios, and often they provided services according to specific domains. For example:

- Four focus group counselors at a comprehensive urban high school with small learning communities each had caseloads determined by their service domain: one of the counselors had a caseload of 850 students from the general population (and indicated that a colleague had a caseload of 780 students); another focus group counselor served only those students at risk of failing the CAHSEE, while a third counselor was assigned to serve the school's 475 English learners (EL), and the fourth counselor served as resource specialist for the school's 375 students with disabilities (HS-5).
- A focus group of five counselors at a comprehensive suburban high school reported that each had a student caseload of approximately 350 students assigned alphabetically; each counselor also had a service domain such as personal/social, peer education/diversity, crisis intervention/ parent education, college testing/AP testing/PSAT, scholarships, and AVID/School-to-Career pathway coordinator (HS-7).
- Counselors at another large comprehensive suburban high school reported that their 2007-08 caseloads had been reduced to approximately 400:1 from 440:1 as a result of receiving funds from AB 1802; however, counselors were also designated by service domains such as ROP students and attendance issues, behavior, recruitment, and retention (420:1); grade nine and AVID students (350:1 ratio); AP/GATE/General/scholarships; special education and alphabetical; and ELD, supplemental, migrant (HS-1).
- Four focus group counselors at a large comprehensive suburban high school had caseloads of approximately 375 students, except for one counselor who had a caseload of 350 students that included the school's 40 EL students (HS-2).
- One counselor interviewed at a rural comprehensive high school indicated that his student caseload had been reduced to 482 from 600 as a result of AB 1802 funding for an additional .25 FTE counselor (HS-6).
- The lead counselor at another small rural comprehensive high school served all of the school's 183 students with support from an additional .50 FTE as a result of AB 1802 funding (HS-9).

- At a charter high school with emphasis on CTE, the one counselor interviewed served all 1,612 students attending the charter school on a half-day basis; students were also served by counselors at their “home” high school sites (HS-3).
- At an alternative urban high school with an emphasis on CTE, the counselors had student caseloads based on service domains such that one counselor served the school’s 100 grade nine students while the school’s two additional counselors each served 130 students in grades ten through 12 (HS-8).
- At a magnet, urban high school with a CTE focus, the two counselors shared the student caseload of approximately 481 students, with one counselor also assigned to coordination of testing and other administrative responsibilities (HS-4).
- At a large urban middle school with a year-round schedule, the two counselors each had caseloads of 950 students for two of the three schedule tracks, which had been reduced from 1,000 students as a result of support from AB 1802 funding; the caseload for the third track was 850 and 500 students, respectively (MS-1).
- Two counselors at an urban middle school indicated that the full-time counselor serves the school’s 600 students with support from an additional part-time counselor funded as a result of AB 1802 funds; students were seen on a regular and as-needed basis by both counselors (MS-3).

Counselors were asked to elaborate further regarding Assembly Bill (AB) 1802 and Senate Bill (SB) 405 to clarify whether the school site had applied for or received funding under these provisions.

\* Nine of the counselor focus groups affirmed that their schools had received funding under AB 1802 to increase the counseling staff and thereby reduce their student caseloads, to expand services, or to provide intervention and remedial coursework and guidance for students at risk of not graduating from high school due to their inability to pass the CAHSEE or required courses. These focus groups reported that this funding program allowed for additional staffing hours which resulted in improving student access to counseling services (MS-1, MS-3, HS-1, HS-2, HS-4, HS-5, HS-6, HS-7, and HS-9). Three schools revealed that their districts had received AB 1802 funds, but that funding was not allocated to their sites (MS-2, HS-3, and HS-8).<sup>†</sup>

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\* Assembly Bill 1802, entitled the Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling Program of 2006, provided funding to increase school counseling services to grades seven through 12 to include information on educational and vocational options and additional services for students at-risk of not passing the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE).

<sup>†</sup> At one middle school where the school counselors did not participate in the scheduled focus group, the principal reported that her district had received AB 1802 funds, but that funds were not distributed to her middle school (MS-2).

Schools that receive funding under AB 1802/SB 405 are mandated to provide an individual review of academic and department records and career goals for each student. Seven of the counselor focus group sites discussed the process for developing individualized learning plans for students at their schools (HS-1, HS-2, HS-4, HS-7, HS-8, HS-9, and MS-3). Only four high school focus groups, however, included career guidance as part of those individualized plans. These focus groups shared the following examples:

- The four-year plan required students at a large suburban comprehensive high school to pass all university a-g requirements, to complete an additional 10 units of CTE, and to pass a business technology class. Career planning occurred once grade nine students had taken a two-hour aptitude assessment, received an orientation to the career center, and learned about obtaining a work permit (HS-1).
- Students at a rural comprehensive high school were required to adopt a “personal learning plan” which spans four years; counselors meet with all tenth grade students to evaluate progress toward meeting the university a-g requirements and to review students’ career plans for the future (HS-9).
- At a large suburban comprehensive high school, students were required to complete particular grade-level objectives as part of their four-year plan, which expanded career exploration opportunities by combining the core curriculum with career pathway electives. Counseling services included career planning only to the extent that students were advised on what college preparatory courses to take in high school to qualify for college admission after graduation (HS-7).
- At another large suburban comprehensive high school, a form used by counselors to help students develop individualized plans prompted counselors to discuss career goals with students. The counselors met with grade 11 students, instructed students to access COIN and web-based software (*GetInsights.com*) and reviewed students’ individualized plans with them upon requests by parents (HS-2).
- Grades 11 and 12 students at an urban charter school with emphasis on CTE met with the site’s only counselor after the first year to review student progress and to evaluate whether the student wanted to change lab focus. Teachers primarily provided career guidance relative to each lab’s learning objectives. Although this site had one guidance counselor for more than 1,600 students, students also had access to their “home” high school counselors. As the counselor pointed out, “grades 11 and 12 students had applied to attend this charter school with a career focus already established; they attend three hours per day concurrently with attendance at their home high school” in one of two collaborating districts (HS-3).
- At a career technical urban alternative high school, the counselor developed a four-year individualized plan with grade nine students; however, the school offered some but not all courses meeting the university a-g requirements. To compensate, an agreement was established with the local community college for students to enroll in specific courses to meet the a-g requirements. (HS-8).

At focus group sites where there was no process for developing individualized learning plans, counselors explained potential obstacles preventing them from doing so. Two high

school focus groups reported providing no formal individualized planning for students other than encouraging all students to complete the university a-g requirements in preparation for college eligibility (HS-5 and HS-6). In a focus group discussion at a rural comprehensive high school, the full-time counselor described his role at the school as a “damage control technician” because 80 to 90 percent of his meetings with students were on an urgent-care basis to discuss their attendance or academic performance (HS-6). He indicated that nearly every grade nine student at the school had an “F” grade and that 25 of the grade 11 students (in a school of 500) needed to attend summer school in order to graduate the following year. He reported that the school had a career technician who provided some career planning with students, but he could not elaborate on the details of those services.

Similarly, the two middle school counselor focus groups both discussed how their services to students emphasized academic progress, promotion from middle school to high school, and preparation to meet university a-g admission requirements (MS-1 and MS-3). Middle school counselors indicated that meetings with students involved reviewing grades and attendance, encouraging, and advising students on what classes to take. At one middle school, the counselors also explained that there were many other pressing service priorities, from providing students with backpacks and supplies to providing them with medical services and food (MS-3). In addition, the middle school counselors discussed the difficulty of communicating with parents, and they expressed consensus of opinion that middle school students in general do not have an idea of what they want to do with their lives in the future (MS-1). Counselors related efforts to engage students in dialogue about their future plans and to encourage them to make academic progress in preparation for high school.

### ***Provision of Career Guidance Counseling***

All counselors were asked whether they explicitly provide career guidance to their assigned students. The two counselor focus groups at the middle schools stated that there were no formal provisions for career guidance. However, one counselor focus group pointed out that the middle schools were required to conduct an articulation process for students transitioning into high school. Counselors at this site coordinated an annual orientation, wherein high school students were invited to meet with grade eight students to provide advice and recommendations about options for attending different local high schools and for selecting enrollment in a career pathway, academy, or small learning community. As one middle school counselor stated, “Collaboration between the high school and middle school is important, and a good program would prepare a student for a career and then for a college” (MS-3).

At the high school level, most of the counselor focus groups indicated that the provision for career guidance is secondary to academic guidance services. Counselors also noted, however, that career guidance is often offered primarily by faculty or other staff rather than school counselors, as the following examples illustrate.

- Career guidance and a variety of activities for each grade-level occurred and were ongoing throughout the school year at the career center (HS-1).
- The career center coordinator was available to assist students with career exploration and provided activities such as guest speaker events during the students' lunch break (HS-2).
- The school's employment outreach coordinator/business liaison established and coordinated student internship and job-shadowing opportunities (HS-4).
- Students were assigned to small learning communities that emphasized specific curriculum, including some career pathways; the school did not have a work experience coordinator or a career center on campus (HS-5).
- The school's counselor did not provide career guidance due to other priorities but relied on the Regional Occupational Program teacher or the career technician to provide students with career guidance (HS-6).
- Approximately 20 percent of the school's students consulted with a school-to-work advisor after they had chosen a career pathway (HS-7).
- Career guidance by counselors included reviewing with grade nine students the results of their *Naviance.com* interest assessment survey. Counselors devoted approximately eight to ten hours a week to provide these services (HS-8).
- Counselors stated that teachers were available to assist students who ask for advice for career development. The principal, vice principal and counselors were focused on developing the goal of embedding more career pathway information in the day-to-day curriculum (HS-9).

At the focus group sites where there was no provision for career guidance, counselors were asked to explain potential obstacles. Some counselor groups cited that there was a lack of adequate counseling staff at their sites and that time was needed to serve other priorities involving student behavior, attendance or low performance. One counselor focus group reiterated the philosophy of their local community that placed high priority on testing and college readiness as the only and best option for preparing students for the future after high school (HS-2). Two other high school counselor focus groups discussed the limited resources available to prepare students who were not ready to go to college directly from high school (HS-5 and HS-6). Most of the counseling focus groups expressed the opinion that, to overcome these obstacles, additional resources were necessary to reach all students equally in terms of providing adequate academic, personal/social, and career guidance counseling.

### **Curriculum Development for Career Development; Master School Schedule; and Local School Board and Administrative Views**

#### ***Curriculum Development for Career Development***

Each school counselor focus group was asked to describe whether any curriculum had been developed by counselors or adopted at their site for career exploration. Generally,



counselor focus groups reported that, if available, such curricula had been developed or adopted by the school's academic departments and offered by varying degrees either schoolwide to all students or to those students enrolled in a particular course of study or program (HS-1, HS-3, HS-4, HS-5, HS-6, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9).

Counselors at one high school, where no curriculum for career exploration had been developed, reported that recent recommendations following an accreditation review were to integrate more opportunities for career exploration by offering resources for students to independently conduct research both on campus and via Internet links on the school's website. Counselors reported that these recommendations were being implemented, and in addition, the school's career center coordinator had organized an on-campus speaker series presenting local business representatives of different occupations (HS-2).

Counselors were asked to indicate whether the school's CTE courses were aligned to state standards and frameworks. At most sites, the counselor focus groups revealed that the process of aligning curriculum to standards was ongoing and pending. However, a counselor interviewed at a charter school with CTE emphasis confirmed alignment and articulation of courses with ROP courses, so that students with grades "C" or better would receive partial credit for introductory courses at the community colleges, the California State University, and the University of California (HS-3). Two other focus groups indicated that the curriculum is aligned for at least one course of study and articulated with the local community colleges (i.e., Certified Nursing Assistant and Construction Technology programs) (HS-4 and HS-8).

### ***Master School Schedule***

Several of the focus groups were queried as to whether the school's class periods were scheduled traditionally at 55 minutes each, scheduled as block periods or a combination thereof, and whether or not this factor affected the school's capacity to offer career exploration curriculum.\* Six of the focus groups reported a block or modified block schedule (MS-1, HS-2, HS-3, HS-4, HS-5, HS-8, and HS-9). Several counselors in these focus groups reported the benefits of block scheduling as follows:

- Benefits of the block schedule used by an urban magnet high school with emphasis on CTE were that students moved more quickly through the course material, were able to take more electives and earned more credits over the course of the year; the school used a schedule wherein students take four classes each quarter for a total of 64 units over the four years of high school (HS-4).
- The benefits of a block schedule for students at a rural comprehensive high school were that it allowed adequate time for project-based learning and more flexibility for students to participate in internship opportunities during the school session without missing other courses (HS-9).

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\* This focus group question was not posed at three of the focus group sites due to time constraints.

- The benefits of block periods for students at an urban charter high school with an emphasis on CTE related to teachers becoming well acquainted with their students as a result of spending concentrated time with them (HS-3).

Three of the counselor focus groups reported using a traditional schedule with 55-minute class periods. Counselors in these three focus groups believed that the school's daily schedule was not a factor affecting their school's capacity to offer career exploration and development curriculum (MS-3, HS-6, and HS-7).

### ***Local School Board and Administrative Views***

The focus group moderator recited the language of Education Code § 51228 (b) and suggested that there may be different interpretations about whether this law requires provisions for:

- Basic skills programs (reading, writing, and arithmetic).
- Career technical educational programs.
- Career awareness, exploration or orientation programs.
- Some combination of all of these services.\*

The moderator asked counselors to share their opinions on the views of their local school board, their school administrator, and to offer their own interpretations as counselors in terms of meeting the objectives of law. Counselors' opinions reflected the programs or curriculum offered at their schools as defined by their schools' objectives and missions.

Among the counselor focus groups, five interpreted the view of their local governing board regarding Education § 51228 (b) to require a comprehensive approach by offering a combination of all three provisions (HS-1, HS-3, HS-4, HS-7, and HS-9). Counselors provided the following comments:

- Counselors at a large suburban comprehensive high school, with a progressive career exploration program for all students, speculated that their local board's view included "providing students with practical knowledge of fine arts and industrial arts in addition to the basic skills" (HS-7).
- Counselors at a small rural comprehensive high school, with a progressive career exploration program geared for all students, indicated that the governing board "supports providing a combination of services to accommodate all students to get a high school diploma; even if not all students can meet the university a-g requirements, they will have basic skills to get an entry level job after high school" (HS-9).

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\* Education Code § 51228 (b) requires local governing boards of schools serving students in grades seven through 12 to offer a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry-level employment skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school.

- Counselors at a magnet school with an emphasis on CTE believed their school board sought to “provide opportunity for students to develop skill sets through attendance at small schools with academy themes” (HS-4).

Several counselor focus groups understood the view of their local governing boards on the education code to primarily emphasize the development of basic skills and mastery of the university a-g requirements (MS-3, HS-2, HS-5, and HS-6), as the following comments illustrate.

- Counselors at an urban middle school stated that their “local board emphasizes exposing all students to the university a-g requirements with a priority on the urgent need to prepare students for high school” (MS-3).
- A counselor interviewed at a small rural comprehensive high school believed the local board’s view was to ensure that “every student needs a diploma to get a job (because we don’t want to see them on social services or in jail). They need basic skills” (HS-6).
- Counselors at a large urban comprehensive high school pointed out that “the district is requiring all tenth-grade students to take the PSAT test, which would indicate that the district is pushing for a college-bound priority” (HS-5).
- Counselors at a suburban comprehensive high school reported that their “board serves and supports the community, which places high priority on college prep and the goal for students to be college-bound” (HS-2).

When asked about the view of their school administrators regarding the same law, most of the counselor focus groups related a commitment on the part of principals to support provisions for both basic academic skills and efforts to promote career exploration and development (HS-1, HS-2, HS-3, HS-4, HS-6, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). However, counselor focus groups at sites with an emphasis on CTE suggested a greater administrative support for career-based education and implementation of strategies that meet the educational needs of all students whether or not college bound (HS-3, HS-4, and HS-8).\*

In discussing their own views of the state law, counselors at all focus group sites discussed a range of beliefs, including that it is essential to provide students with an education that combines skill sets leading to basic financial self-sufficiency, access to greater opportunities, and an ability to contribute to society to a focus on academic preparedness for college entry. Their comments also mirrored their schools’ articulated missions and student learning objectives, as the following statements describe.

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\* At two focus group sites where the principals were relatively new to their school or their position, the counselors were unwilling to speculate on the viewpoints of their principal (MS-3 and HS-5).

- One counselor focus group at an urban magnet high school with a CTE program referred to the theory of “eliminating the achievement gap by providing students with multiple opportunities for access to the economy through education and job skills” (HS-4).
- Another counselor interviewed at a charter high school with a CTE program articulated that the school’s “teachers develop and implement the curriculum model for preparing students to continue at the college level in advanced fields as well as teaching time management, respect and responsibility, self-reliance, and a combination of vocational skills” (HS-3).
- Counselors at a large suburban comprehensive high school discussed their belief that attention to test scores and the state’s Academic Performance Index (API) overshadows job readiness and skills training (HS-2).

## **Evaluation of Career Development Activities, Programs, and Tools**

### ***Career Exploration Activities***

The focus group moderator defined career exploration activities as career days, college fairs, guest speaker presentations, field trips or similar endeavors offered to promote career exploration. Counselors responded by listing the types and frequencies of activities, specifying the extent of student participation, and rating the usefulness of their activities on a scale of one to five (very useful) as to whether they raised students’ awareness or provided information to students regarding the regional or statewide career opportunities.

While the counselor focus groups convened at two middle schools each reported that career development activities were limited or nonexistent, they also expressed a willingness to offer such activities to students in the future. One of the counselor focus groups indicated that career exploration activities could be offered along with the other topics covered during the homeroom period (MS-1). The second middle school counselor focus group commented that career exploration programs could be integrated into their core curriculum and could be effective and beneficial if delivered properly to students (MS-3).

Counselors recounted a wide array of activities at the high school level. Most of the nine high school counselor focus groups referred to an annual or semi-annual career day or college fair offered schoolwide to all students (HS-1, HS-4, HS-5, HS-6, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). Counselors also described other activities such as guest speaker presentations and field trips to colleges or local industry sites. At most sites, these were offered schoolwide or to students according to the scope of a small learning community, Partnership Academy, or ROP course. Career activities or events were typically coordinated by faculty and staff. Among the high school focus groups, most of the counselors gave high ratings for the usefulness of the activities in terms of raising student awareness and providing students with information about local and statewide career opportunities. In terms of obstacles, however, an exception was noted by counselors at a magnet high school with emphasis on CTE. The counselors at this school believed that the school’s

activities were not as effective as in the past because of the school's changing student demographics and an increasing Latino student population (HS-4).

### ***Career Development Programs***

Counselors at each focus group site were asked to describe their schools' programs for career exploration or development that might include job shadowing, mentoring, work-based learning, or any other programs offered through the school's career center or CTE program (regional occupational program courses, Partnership Academy, adult education, or Tech Prep).\*

Each of the high school counselor focus groups referred to one or more programs offered at their schools that were aimed to help students explore or develop a career interest. Counselors at four of the nine high schools described programs that required students to complete job shadowing assignments (HS-4, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). Two of these focus groups occurred at comprehensive high schools (one large suburban and one small rural), and two occurred at alternative high schools with emphasis on CTE. A couple of examples include:

- Students in grade 11 were required to job shadow with a mentor, and grade 12 students had to complete a 45-hour internship (HS-7).
- Students were required to complete and report on two job shadowing experiences (HS-9).

In general, counselor focus groups at sites with ROP, career pathways, Partnership Academies, or small learning communities with an emphasis on CTE explained that career exploration and development lessons were integrated with specific course curriculum and often included the use of project-based learning and leadership training activities. With regard to career center programs, counselors at three focus group sites stated that their on-campus career center provided information and access to computer-assisted career assessment surveys (HS-1, HS-6, and HS-7). In terms of obstacles, counselors at one focus group site observed that the career center was significantly underutilized by students (HS-7).

The counselor focus groups were also asked to evaluate the usefulness of the career exploration programs offered at their schools by rating the programs on a scale of one to five (very useful) on the basis of:

- Raising student awareness.
- Providing information about local and statewide career opportunities.
- Providing students with first hand experience about a career of interest.

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\* This discussion did not apply to the middle schools visited and was not addressed with those counselor focus groups.

- Motivating students to study at current grade level.
- Motivating students to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels.

Counselor focus groups generally gave high ratings for their schools' career exploration programs in terms of their usefulness for raising awareness and providing students with information about local (although not necessarily statewide) career opportunities.

Counselors who rated programs as low in terms of their usefulness indicted that access for all students is restricted to students enrolled in particular courses, thereby limiting schoolwide participation. Conversely, ratings were highest for usefulness in raising awareness, providing information and first hand experience among counselors at sites where existing programs were offered to or mandated for all students.

Counselors provided an average rating for usefulness of programs in terms of motivating students to study and achieve at or above grade level, explaining that career exploration programs do not reach enough students when access is restricted by students' enrollment in certain classes or when access is self-selected or contingent on student initiative. Two counselor focus groups recognized that many schools have a distinct number of students who were already highly engaged and self-motivated to achieve at grade-level or above (HS-1 and HS-2). Noting the high rate of students who drop out of high school, one counselor focus group discussed recommendations and potential benefits by expanding work-based programs to include more students as an incentive for them to continue attending high school (HS-5). Comments revealed perspectives of counselors as follows:

- “If the goal is to keep students in school and progressing at grade-level or better until graduation, then career development programs may help students who are struggling and falling behind. However, I’ve noticed older students are not highly motivated to excel and do not take advantage of the advanced instruction when they no longer need the class credit for graduation” (HS-9, small rural comprehensive high school).
- “Students explore industry fields and are either motivated to continue learning or they are prompted to change fields of study based on their interest level” (HS-3, urban charter high school with a CTE focus).
- “Students are particularly motivated to study once they job shadow or begin an internship” (HS-8, urban alternative high school with a CTE emphasis).
- “Student motivation is reflected by grades; some vocational courses are keeping some students engaged in school. If only academic coursework were offered, some students would become unmotivated and possibly lost” (HS-7, large suburban comprehensive high school).

### ***Career Exploration Tools***

Career exploration tools were also discussed and rated by the counselor focus groups. The focus group moderator defined career exploration tools to include diagnostic, aptitude or interest inventory surveys designed to allow students to investigate, discover, and develop career or job interests. Nearly all of the nine high school counselor focus groups confirmed that their schools offered students access to web-based software tools

such as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) Career Exploration Program, *Bridges.com* Choices Explorer, *GetInsights.com*, or *Naviance.com* (all except HS-3 and HS-5).<sup>\*</sup> One exception was reported by a counselor focus group at an urban comprehensive high school where tools were only available to students with disabilities who were enrolled in the Workability Program and have an Independent Education Plan (HS-5). The second exception was discussed by counselors at a charter school with an emphasis on CTE where diagnostic tools were not offered, but students were required to complete various, in-depth career exploration assignments throughout the school year that necessitated Internet and other research and reporting (HS-3).

In terms of how frequently students access career exploration tools, most of the high school counselor focus groups stated that the assessment tests and web-based resources were available for use by students at given times during the school year, according to grade-level or class enrollment. For example, at one focus group site, all grade ten students were required to complete an interest inventory evaluation (HS-9). Another counselor focus group stated that all students were instructed to access the evaluation tools available at *Naviance.com* during grade nine, and that the tool remained available to students for use independently in later grades (HS-8). Five of the counselor focus groups reported providing students with access to ASVAB annually and in some cases according to a particular grade-level (HS-2, HS-4, HS-6, HS-8, and HS-9). At other sites, students were also offered continuous, independent access to the school's diagnostic, aptitude and interest inventory tools (i.e., *Bridges.com*, *GetInsights.com*, or *Naviance.com*) through the school's career center or multimedia classroom (HS-1, HS-2, HS-3, HS-7, and HS-8).

The moderator asked counselors to rate the usefulness of their career exploration tools on a scale of one to five (very useful) based on raising student awareness and providing students with information about local and statewide career opportunities. Generally, the tools were given an average rating among all counselor focus groups and were considered "good for introducing students to career information" such as the various types of occupations available and guidance about necessary education or training. Most counselors agreed that the interest inventories were beneficial and that students enjoyed taking the surveys. At one site where access to web-based aptitude surveys was available but not compulsory for all students, the focus group counselors agreed that the "tools would be more effective in raising student awareness if every student were required to take the tests" (HS-2).

Although the middle school counselor focus groups indicated their awareness of Internet-based career exploration tools such as *CareerZone.com*, for instance, counselors at both middle schools verified that such tools were not offered to students at their schools. One middle school counselor focus group advised, however, that students with disabilities receive career-based lessons, including some use of career exploration tools.

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<sup>\*</sup> One counselor focus group was unable to respond to questions regarding tools due to time constraints. (HS-1)

## Parental Involvement

The focus group moderator queried all counselor focus groups about the inclusion of parents in any discussions, activities, or programs relating to their children's career interests, and whether school counselors expected parents to play an active role in this regard. In general, school counselors encouraged parents to play an active role. However, they emphasized the importance for students to become independent in the planning process for their own future goals. A counselor focus group at a suburban charter school with emphasis on CTE described a parent-teacher-student triangle and explained that parents sign a contract with the school wherein they agree to support their children's progress and achievement while attending that high school (HS-3).

Some counselors described meeting regularly or as needed with parents, most often with the primary attention being on the students' academic progress and performance rather than on career guidance. For example, at one comprehensive high school in a suburban community, counselors had met with the parents of all grade 11 students. In the counselor's words, "Parents are encouraged to come; and we have some over-involved parents" (HS-2). Counselors also described other events for parents, which may include monthly parent association or school site-council meetings, or annual presentations for parents, including "Back to School," and "Open House" nights. Three counseling focus groups described hosting an annual "Parent Academy" or "Parent Night" to provide general information on high school graduation, admissions requirements, and financial aid for attending community college, CSU and UC, and vocational programs (HS-7, HS-9, and HS-4).

Some counselor focus groups reported using Internet websites and e-mail to communicate with parents and to report student progress on a biweekly basis (HS-2, HS-7, and HS-8). For example, one counselor referred to *ConnectEd* as a means for providing parents with information through a telephone broadcast system (HS-8). Although half of the counselor focus groups reported a strong parent component, others indicated low to moderate parent participation in their children's career development activities. Counselor focus groups noted possible barriers to participation relative to their particular schools as follows:

- The need for written announcements to be translated for Spanish-speaking parents (HS-4).
- A significant population of "students who commute to their school from another city or distant neighborhoods, and whose parents are not local either" (HS-6).
- A lack of time or interest, or as phrased by one counselor, "Parents are expected to play a role and some are conscientious, but many are unwilling, unable, or simply do not care to play a role" (HS-9).



## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS TO CALIFORNIA’S OVERALL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES**

Each of the counselor focus groups was asked to discuss whether resources are provided to students regarding the variety of careers and associated skills and salaries; and whether their school engages with local business or community organizations to promote student awareness and orientation of the regional and state economies. In conjunction with the latter, the moderator asked counselor focus groups to describe their schools’ processes for developing relationships or partnerships with local businesses or community organizations and to discuss their opinions about the potential benefit to students resulting from their schools’ involvement with local businesses or community organizations.

### **Provision of Economic and Employment Information**

The focus group moderator asked counselors to discuss whether their school provided information pertaining to the local or statewide economies or related to job outlook or salaries. Some counselor focus groups noted that economic information is provided to students as part of their web-based interest inventory surveys (i.e., *Bridges.com* Choices, *Naviance.com*) (HS-1, HS-7, and HS-8). Other counselor focus groups stated that information is obtained by students as they complete individual Internet research assignments on career fields (HS-3, HS-4, and HS-9). Counselors at two sites also referred to posters and charts displayed on campus that depict information such as a comparison of different wages earned by high school and college graduates, as well as salary-range charts for various occupations (MS-1 and HS-3).

Counselors at one comprehensive suburban high school pointed out that unless teachers take their students to the career center to access economic information, students probably will not receive such information. These counselors explained that since the emphasis at their school was to prepare students for post-secondary education, the main emphasis of information and outreach provided to students is on college eligibility more than employment, skills, and salary trends. Counselors stated that the “college focus” is so strong at this school, that many students were not encouraged or permitted by parents to seek part-time, after school jobs in order to concentrate on academic or athletic progress; counselors at this school agreed that students think much more about options for colleges than about their future career possibilities (HS-2).

Discussions with a counselor at an urban career technical charter high school revealed that the site’s curriculum offers introductory training for fields that require a post-secondary degree and that pay higher salaries (HS-3). The counselor advised as follows:

“Course offerings are dependent upon developments in the fields of industry in our region. Students are taught aspects of local industries with an emphasis on continuing their education in the career field after high school graduation, so that they can return to the region with high level skills and qualifications” (HS-3).

Counselors at another urban alternative high school with an emphasis on CTE discussed students' response to employment and salary information, stating that, "information regarding salaries is very motivating to students. If students see that salaries are higher in other regions or in various careers, they may want to move from the area or to work harder" (HS-8).

The moderator presented counselors with information resulting from an economic analysis setting forth the fastest growing and largest jobs projected through 2014, including salaries and skill sets identified as important to selected industry clusters. Upon review, counselors indicated that the information would be a useful resource for students to use while exploring and researching various occupations. Counselors agreed that students would find relevance in their education by learning about employment trends and observing how specific academic skills were associated with occupations.

### **Engaging with Local Business and Community Organizations**

To gain a perspective on the extent to which students were provided with resources to orient them to their local, regional or the statewide economies, counselor focus groups were asked to discuss how their school engages with local business or community organizations to promote career exploration and development for their students. Most of the counselor focus groups confirmed that their schools had engaged with local businesses and community organizations.\* Counselors at three of the high schools with an emphasis on CTE believed that their students benefitted from the expanded opportunities and material resources that resulted from the partnerships with business (HS-3, HS-4, HS-6, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9).† Three other counselor focus groups that were convened at high schools with comprehensive, college preparatory programs agreed that students benefit from partnerships with local businesses for career exploration and development.

Some of the counselor focus group provided examples of how their schools have worked with businesses to expand career exploration opportunities for students. For instance, one career technical high school engaged with local businesses at all levels of the construction trades. Industry representatives had been the catalyst for creating the magnet school, and counselors reported that both the school principal and the employer outreach coordinator engaged with community leaders and found a reciprocal interest in industry to provide support for students (HS-4). For example, business representatives had served as mentors, participated in job shadowing and internship programs, and acted

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\* The question relating to the school's involvement with local business or community organizations is at the end of the moderator's guide. Due to time constraints, a few counselor groups did not answer this question.

† The discussion relating to engagement with businesses relates to the high schools but is not applicable to the middle schools and therefore was not discussed with the middle school counselors.

as judges for student project presentations. Businesses organizations had also contributed funding for material resources and for student transportation to school-related activities.

Another example of engagement with business was described by a counselor at a charter school high school with a CTE emphasis that was conceived and established as a result of a school-business partnership involving local industry representatives, community organizations, and two neighboring school boards (HS-3). The counselor indicated that the administration and individual lab teachers were responsible for maintaining and managing relationships with local businesses and industries relative to the schools' lab courses. The counselor reported that business organizations had contributed funding for lab equipment and supplies, and each of the labs were dedicated by name to specific contributing firms. The counselor stated that students benefitted from their access to and use of state-of-the-art lab equipment and supplies supported by funds from local businesses.

A third example of business engagement was described by counselors at a career technical alternative high school (HS-8).<sup>\*</sup> The school's director, principal and individual teachers served on a business-education alliance committee and partnered with local business organizations to provide students with mentoring, job shadowing, internship, and work experience opportunities. Business and industry representatives also participate in career day and guest speaker events at the school. Counselors stated that students benefitted from these enhanced resources, which were obtained through the school's partnerships with local businesses.

Counselor focus groups at three comprehensive high schools also discussed similar results from efforts to engage with local business organizations. For example, one of these high schools held a committee seat with the local industrial association's Valley Business Alliance. Counselors indicated that the community's "buy-in" is an important factor for maintaining the school's career exploration program. The administration, teachers, and counselors attended monthly association meetings to foster and promote the collaboration. Business representatives attended and served as judges at the school's annual senior project presentation and also sponsored an annual seminar for grade 11 students known as "Connecting with Success" (HS-7).

Counselors at another focus group site shared an example where local businesses had offered internship opportunities for students as well as vocational certification training. The counselors added that AB 1802 funds had provided for a part-time counseling position to support the administration in communicating with local business organizations (HS-9). The counselors concluded that engaging with business includes membership in

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<sup>\*</sup> Like the two previous examples, this school's programs were designed jointly with members of the business-education alliance based on the fastest growing industries (medical, auto, and technology). Initially, the school also had a fire science program, but it was discontinued due to lack of student interest.

the local chamber of commerce, collaborating and “networking” to provide students with opportunities for mentoring, job shadowing, internships, or work experience programs.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON BARRIERS THAT IMPEDE ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

Counselors at focus group sites where career exploration services and resources were limited or not available were asked to discuss existing obstacles or potential barriers restricting these provisions. For instance, counselors at two high schools where career guidance was not included in students’ individualized learning plans explained that students’ attendance and academic needs were their main priority. The need to focus on students’ progress toward meeting promotion and graduation requirements had precluded these counselors from expanding their services to career guidance (HS-5 and HS-6). In addition to academic needs, middle school counselors also noted that students’ social, emotional, and health needs often required their attention, which decreased time for guidance in other areas (MS-1 and MS-3). Several counselors agreed that inadequate staffing to serve the high population of students, combined with a priority on improving achievement test scores and graduation rates were significant obstacles to providing career development counseling or guidance.

Counselors described other obstacles to providing career development services for all students. For example, at some focus group sites, counselors noted that student participation and access to the career exploration programs and tools were limited by course enrollment or not available to some groups of students either because of age, grade, or academic performance. Counselors believed that these impediments limited their ability to expand student access to activities, programs, and tools. In addition, counselors at one school indicated that since the school and community culture emphasized college readiness, counselors and teachers were expected to provide information primarily relating to the application and admissions requirements of colleges and universities, which precluded them from offering career guidance (HS-2).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COUNSELORS**

Counselor focus groups were invited to offer recommendations on the kinds of activities, programs, or tools that their schools should provide for students to learn about careers available in their local area or statewide and to elaborate on what the school would need in order to provide these resources.\* Overall, the counselor focus groups agreed that a comprehensive curriculum for career exploration should include resources for students to assess their interest or aptitude in particular careers and develop hands-on experience. Counselors also agreed that schools must raise public awareness and interest about career education in order to obtain a vested commitment and financial support from their local

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\* The question relating to the counselors’ recommendations is at the end of the moderator’s guide. Due to time constraints, a few counselor groups did not answer this question (HS-1, HS-4, and HS-7).

business community. They believed that recruiting qualified school administrators, faculty, and staff would also be necessary. Additional specific recommendations were offered as follows:

- Offer middle school students a comprehensive, grade-level curriculum about careers and colleges wherein students in grade six would focus on organizational strategies, grade seven on career and self exploration, and grade eight on next steps for continued post-secondary education and training. In order to achieve this, the counselors suggested that there “needs to be a lot of teacher buy-in, to get everyone on board and to reach all students” (MS-1).
- Offer programs such as MESA or AVID to middle school students, particularly where sites have limited electives (such as no art or foreign language) (MS-3).
- Offer a schoolwide career exploration curriculum as a requirement for all students so that it would not be dependent upon student enrollment in a self-selected program (MS-1, HS-2, HS-5, and HS-6).
- Increase student access to computer technology and software for career exploration and research and offer aptitude and diagnostic tools for all students on a continual basis (HS-3, HS-6, and HS-9).
- Restore funding for vocational electives that provide “hands-on” and internship experience at the high school level (HS-2, HS-5, and HS-8).
- Increase the variety of academy options and expand partnerships with business to garner support for additional student internship opportunities (HS-5, HS-8, and HS-9).



# Principal Interviews

## SUMMARY

The following chapter describes findings from interviewing principals at the three middle schools and the nine high school focus group sites regarding their perspectives of the opportunities for students to access activities, programs, or tools for career exploration and orientation of future career options given their regional and statewide economies. In response to questions and discussion prompts, each of the principals described the various programs offered or other efforts made at their schools to provide students with career awareness education. The findings identify overarching themes that emerged across all of the principal interview discussions.

All references herein to the terms “principal” or “director” relate only to those administrators who participated in the interviews at the selected school sites and are not meant to represent administrators employed at other public schools.

This summary and the report that follows it are intended to supplement and provide context to the data collected through the Careers Project middle and high school principal and counselor survey. In general, the principal interview discussions revealed that:

- Most of the middle and high school principals affirmed that their schools had received AB 1802 funding, which permitted either an increase in the number of counselors at their schools or provided an expansion of career guidance counseling services.
- Middle school principals stressed that their curriculum focuses on student proficiency in basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic. As a result, career development curriculum was not provided formally but might have been introduced on a very limited basis by individual teachers in connection with their core lessons. In contrast, each of the high school principals described some level of career education curriculum offered at their schools, to varying degrees and from site to site. For example, four of the principals offered schoolwide curriculum that was extensively focused on CTE, while five of the principals offered comprehensive curriculum that included at least one ROP elective, career pathway, California Partnership Academy, or small learning community with an emphasis on CTE.
- In the aggregate, high school principals believed that the daily school schedule they used benefitted their students and made a difference in their ability to provide career development information to their students. Most of the high school principals agreed that a block or modified-block school schedule was conducive to providing students with career exploration and development opportunities. On the other hand, three principals using a traditional schedule believed that the 55- to 60-minute class periods

did not impair their school's capacity to provide career exploration curriculum. All three middle school principals advised that some or all of their classes were taught using a block schedule; however, this was not considered a factor affecting their capacity to provide a career exploration curriculum.

- All three middle school principals concurred with the view that their local governing boards' interpretation of state law is to focus on students' basic skills proficiency in preparation for entering high school.\* Among high school principals, their opinions revealed a discord of what their local school boards' views were regarding the interpretation of the law. Some principals interpreted their local governing boards' view as emphasizing provisions for core-content and standards curriculum only, whereas other principals believed that their local boards would place a priority on providing a combination of standards-based curriculum and CTE programs.
- Middle school principals admitted that career exploration activities, programs, or tools were virtually nonexistent for their students, with the exception of some field trips and guest speaker presentations that were organized and offered on a limited basis to some students according to the efforts of individual teachers.
- High school principals described offering their students an array of career exploration activities such as an annual or biennial career day, a college fair, guest speakers, or field trips. In many instances, credit was given to individual teachers for organizing these activities for their students or, in some cases, for all students at their school. Such activities may also be sponsored either by the school district, a local community college, or another private educational institute. Two principals also described an annual college-tour field trip that was offered to some students.
- According to the high school principals, the availability of career exploration or development programs for all students was dependent on the focus and mission of the school. Where a school's emphasis was on CTE, the career exploration or development programs were offered to all students either through their course enrollment or through the required schoolwide learning objectives. At schools where the approach was "comprehensive," career exploratory or development programs were offered, but they were accessed by a limited number of self-selecting students.
- Principals at some sites also discussed how some types of career technical education programs may generate more interest, and be more popular, among students than others. Principals at two high schools with a CTE focus reported that when student enrollment declined for a program, the schools' administration discontinued offering these programs or developed another program to meet students' interest.

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\* Education Code § 51228 (b) requires local school boards serving students in grades seven through 12 to offer a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry-level employment skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school.



- The majority of high school principals advised that their schools maintained licensed software subscriptions to web-based career exploratory tools. Principals reported that student access to these tools was often based on students' grade-level or class enrollment, through the career center, or as otherwise instructed by their teachers.
- Principals considered their career exploration activities, programs, or tools to be useful, in varying degrees, for raising student awareness and providing students with information about their regional or state economies. For example, several principals agreed that career exploration activities, programs, or tools helped students develop a vision for their future which often helped them see the relevance of academic progress. In contrast, some principals noted that the career development services did not reach all students at their schools or that the information provided to them was insufficient. The majority of high school principals gave relatively high ratings for their programs in terms of providing students with first hand experience, or for motivating students to study at their grade-level or for motivating them to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels.
- Principals indicated that parental involvement is primarily focused on their children's academic progress rather than matters relating to career planning. In particular, schools offered parents information regarding high school graduation requirements, college eligibility, and financial aid through annual parent seminars, parent-teacher association meetings, or newsletters. Principals encouraged parents to take an active role in helping their children meet expectations for attendance, grades, and behavior, while students were expected to be responsible for preparing and planning for their own future after graduation.
- Responses from several principals pointed to existing challenges and barriers for providing career exploration or development activities, program, or tools at their sites. These related to inadequate resources, no existing structure or mechanism for inclusion in the existing curriculum, and an emphasis on basic skills instruction for struggling students.
- Middle school principals reported that their schools provide no information relative to the state or local economy to their students. However, most of the high school principals indicated that general economic information was included in web-based career aptitude/assessment software or obtained by students during an Internet search conducted in the process of completing career research projects.
- When asked to share their opinions on information derived from an economic analysis (including the fastest growing and largest employing jobs and associated salaries and job skills) and whether it would be useful to their students, principals at each site revealed an agreement that students would benefit from receiving such information. However, while agreeing that his students would benefit from learning such information, one middle school principal noted the challenges to securing time in the master schedule and funding for faculty to present the information and align it with the existing curriculum.

- Many high school sites have a schoolwide approach to networking and connecting with local industry through business and education alliance memberships or community collaborative groups, by designating some outreach responsibilities to an administrator, career center staff, a school-to-career coordinator, a ROP teacher, an outreach specialist, or a business alliance liaison. Several high school principals pointed to the efforts of individual teachers who worked together within their academic departments, with administrative staff, or engaged directly to recruit, manage, and maintain alliances with business and community organizations. Two middle school principals described a variety of ways they had engaged, albeit limited for students, with local business or community groups.
- Several high school principals commented on the importance of and the benefits gained by students and the school from developing relationships with business and industry representatives and community organizations.

The following sections elaborate in more detail the research team's findings based on interviews with administrators at each of the three middle schools and the nine high schools selected for this study.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS FOR CAREER OPTIONS**

This section reports the perspectives of twelve public school principals serving grades seven through 12 with regard to the availability of resources that promote student preparation for career exploration and development. Principals were interviewed individually at each school site; three were interviewed at middle schools and ten at high schools.\* The interview questions and discussion topics related to the availability of guidance counselors, the means for curriculum development, scheduling options, school board views and other factors such as parental participation and communication. In addition, principals responded to questions regarding the extent and usefulness of activities, programs, or tools available for students to explore career options as well as any barriers that would impede student access to career exploration opportunities. Responses of the middle school principals will be reported first, followed by descriptions of responses received by the high school principals.

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\* At one charter high school, the research team met with the Chief Operating Officer; at one comprehensive high school, the principal was unavailable so the research team met with an assistant principal; and at another alternative high school, the research team met with both the school's principal and director.

## Guidance Counseling

The interviewer asked principals if their school or district had applied for or received AB 1802<sup>\*</sup> funds for supplemental counseling services and whether career guidance is provided to students pursuant to SB 405.<sup>†</sup> Two of the three middle school principals affirmed that their school had received AB 1802 funding, allowing for increases in counseling staff and expanding their services, as described below.

- One middle school principal was able to increase her counseling staff by 0.5 FTE to meet with all grade seven students and their parents; however, this principal was only recently assigned to the middle school from another state and was unaware of the recent enactment of SB 405 (MS-3).
- Another middle school principal indicated that funding for an additional FTE counselor position was received and that, given the school's year-round schedule; the funding was allocated across all four of the counselors to provide continued services to students during all four tracks. Counseling services were also expanded at this middle school site to develop and provide each student with an Individual Culmination Plan (ICP), which assisted them to develop goals toward high school readiness. The principal also employed a counselor designated as a "Diploma Project" counselor to guide at-risk grade eight students with the goal to reduce the district's high school dropout rate. As the principal stated, "You can't wait until high school to work on this" (MS-1).

Most of the high school principals (seven of nine) also affirmed that AB 1802 funds had been received, which permitted either an increase in the number of counselors at their schools or provided an expansion of career guidance counseling services. For example, among these high schools, counseling staff increased by a range of only 0.25 FTE at one school to more than two FTE at another. Principals described the additional counseling services to be focused primarily on:

- Allowing for individualized meetings with students (HS-4, HS-9, and HS-7).
- Preparing at-risk students to pass the CAHSEE (HS-5, HS-6, HS-7, and HS-9).

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<sup>\*</sup> The Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling Program enacted by Assembly Bill 1802 in 2006 increased the availability of school counseling services to provide students in grades seven through 12 with information on available educational and vocational options and to provide specific services to students at-risk of failing the California High School Exit Exam and/or required courses for graduation.

<sup>†</sup> SB 405 expanded the Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling Program to "include provisions for individualized review of the career goals of the pupil and academic and career-related opportunities available to the pupil and for explanation of the coursework and academic progress required for eligibility for admission to a 4-year college."

- Preparing all students to meet the content standards and university a-g admission requirements (HS-1, HS-2, HS-4, and HS-6).
- Including components of career pathways curriculum (job shadowing, a college tour program for juniors, and prioritization for at-risk students) to enhance counseling services (HS-9).

One principal of a large suburban comprehensive high school elaborated that, “the emphasis from the district is that students must be college ready and that is what students are asked to do. Vocational programs were looked down upon, but the reality is that 14 to 15 percent of jobs do not require a degree and many students go back to school to get applicable skills after they graduate from college. It’s important to prepare students for both college and work after high school” (HS-7).

### **Curriculum Development for Career Development; Master School Schedule; and Local School Board and Administrative Views**

#### ***Curriculum Development for Career Development***

The interviewer inquired as to whether they, as principals or other staff had developed or adopted a curriculum for their school for career development, and if so, whether the curriculum was shared by staff or coordinated with other schools. The interviewer also asked principals whether any CTE courses were offered, and if so, whether they were aligned to the state standards and frameworks.

The three middle school principals stated that no formal career exploration curriculum had been developed or adopted at their schools. One principal reported, however, that counselors had shared some career education information to students during the home room period (MS-1). Another middle school principal mentioned that the school’s computer applications’ teacher offers a lesson with some information about careers and salaries for his elective class (MS-3).

Each of the high school principals described career exploration curriculum that had been developed or adopted at their schools, as represented by the comments below:

- The school had a full-time ROP career center and coordinator who administered the district and county-wide career pathways programs. In 2003, the CTE program was aligned with the school’s Expected Statewide Learning Results (ESLRs), which designated that “every student will be a valuable employee.” The district instituted a matriculation pathway beginning with grade eight students and continuing to the local CSU campus. The district also adopted a formal CTE high school graduation requirement and all of the CTE courses were aligned to the state standards and frameworks (HS-1).
- The school had developed career pathways in Education, Robotics, Computer, Sports Medicine, and Engineering, some of which were coordinated with the local community college. Most CTE classes were aligned with state standards (HS-2).

- The school's career development curriculum was an extension of efforts initiated by local industry and high schools of the two collaborating school districts to offer individualized labs. The school's advisory committee partnered with the local the community college, technical school, CSU and UC campuses, and private universities (HS-3).
- The school staff developed career development curriculum which is aligned with the state CTE standards, integrated with the interdisciplinary small-learning communities as well as industry standards. The school has coordinated its curriculum with one feeder middle school and the coordination with another is in development. The school also fosters a collaborative relationship with the local community college and local CSU campus from which students benefit (HS-4).
- The small learning communities had adopted some career-based curriculum through the ROP and a California Partnership Academy course (HS-5).
- For the courses within the ROP, teachers worked collaboratively on the curriculum; however, with other courses, collaboration among teachers was inconsistent. The high school did not coordinate its curriculum with feeder middle schools or the local community colleges. The principal believed that the CTE courses were aligned to the state standards and frameworks (HS-6).
- Individual teachers developed a curriculum for career development, which they coordinated among the school's staff; they were in the process of coordinating with the feeder middle schools and the local community college. Eighteen career pathways were available, and CTE course alignment with the State standards and framework was also in progress (HS-7).
- Faculty developed curriculum for career development which was integrated with the school's ESLRs and the CTE state standards and frameworks through the California Department of Education's CTE Online resource. The curriculum was shared schoolwide. Some courses were articulated with the community college, and all courses had met industry standards. The principal and director noted that because the school's alternative school model, it had been difficult to recruit students from the district's high schools, so it focused on working with middle school counselors for early outreach to grade eight students in the district (HS-8).
- Faculty developed a curriculum series for grades nine through 12 focusing on career pathways and exploration to provide post-secondary options to students who completed activities at each grade level. The curriculum was shared to a degree, with some teachers collaborating more so than others. CTE course alignment to state standards and frameworks was pending (HS-9).

### ***Master School Schedule***

The interviewer asked each principal if classes were taught using a traditional master schedule, a block period or a combination thereof and if the daily schedule affected their schools' or teachers' ability to provide career development information to all students. All three middle school principals advised that some or all of their classes were taught using a block schedule; however, this was not considered a factor affecting their capacity

to provide a career exploration curriculum. As paraphrased, the middle school principals explained:

- The school has block periods, which would not hinder or otherwise affect whether the school offers career development (MS-1).
- The school mainly uses a traditional schedule with a block schedule for a few classes. The bell schedule does not make the difference as to whether or not career development information is provided to students (MS-2).
- The general student body has a traditional schedule. However, all students who had scored “Below Basic” or “Far Below Basic” on the California Standardized Tests for English Language-Arts attended blocks of up to three periods (three hours) of English Language-Arts including English language development classes for English learner students (MS-3).

Each high school principal also described their school’s daily bell schedule and the impact it had on providing students with career development information. Their responses were varied regarding the type of master school schedule employed. In the aggregate, it was their belief that the schedule they used benefitted their students and made a difference whether they were able to provide career development information to their students. For example, three principals utilized a traditional master schedule of 55-minute periods. Of these, two principals believed that a traditional schedule did not affect their schools’ or teachers’ capacity to provide career development information to all students (HS-1 and HS-6). One principal stated, “Whether it makes a difference to have a block schedule is unknown and would depend on the culture of the school” (HS-7). The remaining six high school principals employed a block schedule (HS-2, HS-3, HS-4, and HS-9) or a modified block schedule (HS-7 and HS-8) at their schools. Their particular comments are presented below.

- At a suburban charter school with an emphasis on CTE for grades 11 and 12, students attend either morning or afternoon for a three-hour block period in conjunction with attending a “home” high school for the balance of the day. The director at this site reported that the block schedule enabled teachers to become well acquainted with each student (HS-3).
- A principal at another career education magnet school using four 90-minute block periods was convinced that the schedule enabled students to take ten career technical electives courses over four years while also completing university a-g admission requirements (which exceed the number of electives students were able to take with the traditional schedule) (HS-4).
- A principal at a rural high school who had recently changed to a block schedule indicated that it made a difference in providing career development information to students by allowing teachers time to enhance lesson plans with career development activities (HS-9).

With regard to the two high schools employing modified block schedules:

- A principal and director at a charter school with career-technical emphasis agreed that their modified block schedule made a difference for providing career development information to students. More importantly, this required teachers to effectively present information to students so that it would be relevant to the coursework (HS-8).
- A second principal who used a modified block schedule at a comprehensive high school did not believe that the schedule made any difference whether career information was offered or not (HS-5).

### ***Local School Board and Administrative Views***

The interviewer referred to a section of state law and asked principals to interpret the view of their local school board and their own view regarding the scope of compliance with the law.\* Various interpretations of the law's requirements could include one or more of the following:

- Basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic).
- Career and Technical Education programs.
- Career awareness, exploration or orientation.

In describing the school board's view, one middle school principal reported that an emphasis at the district level is on "stemming the dropout rate," by preparing high school students to be college ready; however, this principal pointed out that the district is struggling to bring EL students up to a level of proficiency in English. The principal's view of the law was that, "We have to prioritize by building up academic skills to prevent high school dropouts; I welcome it, but it is a challenge for us" (MS-1). Another middle school principal added that her school board supported providing a combination of all three objectives. Her view, however, was that students need to have the three 'R's' before anything else because they cannot "fill out a job application if they can't read; they won't even be considered" (MS-2).† These comments by the middle school principals reveal their agreement that at grades seven and eight, the priority is on preparing students for high school by focusing on developing basic academic skills.

Among high school principals, their opinions revealed a discord of what their local boards' views regarding the interpretation of the law such that some local governing boards would emphasize provisions for core-content and standards curriculum only,

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\* Education Code § 51228 (b) requires local school boards serving students in grades seven through 12 to offer a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry-level employment skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school.

† One of the middle school principals interviewed had only recently been hired by the school district and was reluctant to provide any interpretation of the referenced state law (MS-3).

whereas other boards would place priority on providing a combination of standards-based curriculum and career and technical education programs. Several comments by principals indicated a consensus in the importance of providing academic and basic skills programs as well as the value in enhancing vocational or CTE programs “so that students have clear choices to help them develop a plan for the future.” The topic elicited much discussion among principals as their responses below indicate.

- “The school has a vision of what students will become when they graduate: they will leave high school prepared to be good employees and citizens. Members of the community have a stake in wanting to be well-served by students who are prepared and have excellent skills through quality CTE programs” (HS-1).
- “Students must have a plan that includes some post-secondary education; the rate of transfer to either college or a technical training program is 95 percent at this school. The course list has evolved over time to meet students’ preferences and to match education reform, the changing economy, and the region’s resources” (HS-3).
- “All three objectives are necessary for students; however, coordinating with business and developing work-based learning activities takes a lot of time and money” (HS-4).
- “Unfortunately, we’ve moved too far from vocational offerings and more toward academics, at the risk of losing some of our students” (HS-5).
- “Compliance with the law includes providing students with technical skills and an understanding of career ladders, including basic skills and the ability to demonstrate soft skills such as working in teams, communicating effectively, and thinking critically” (HS-7).
- “A priority is placed on graduating students with some training in an area that would promote each student’s ability to continue their education and training. In a ‘perfect world,’ we would offer integrated small-learning programs that include university a-g opportunities for all students, and give students a reason to learn” (HS-8).

## **Evaluation of Career Development Activities, Programs, and Tools**

### ***Career Exploration Activities***

The interviewer defined career exploration activities as including career day, college fair, guest speaker events, and field trips. The middle school principals each admitted career exploration activities were limited at their schools. For example,

- One principal’s school offered an annual career day involving representatives from local police and fire departments (MS-3).
- Another principal described an annual college fair which was organized and sponsored by the school district and announced district-wide to all students (MS-2).
- A third middle school principal hosted a recruitment fair to introduce students to the district’s high school programs (MS-1). The principal also shared that plans were



proceeding among the school's counselors for a career and college day to be held for the 2008-2009 school year.

Principals at each middle school advised that guest speaker events and field trips were initiated by teachers on a limited basis and may not relate directly to career planning.

Each high school principal recounted offering an array of career development activities such as career day, college fair or similar types of workshops or events. In most instances, principals described these activities as being coordinated by individual teachers for their students and sponsored either by their school, district, or a local community college. The availability of their school's activities to all students varied from site to site, depending on how they were planned or structured. Principals reported that where these activities were sponsored by their district, a local community college, or local private college, the event might occur off campus on a Saturday (i.e., at a district middle school or a local community college), and student attendance was often self-selected. When individual teachers organized their schools' activities, principals reported that student attendance was usually mandated (by grade-level or by a specialized program) as part of the course work. Most principals indicated that all students, schoolwide, were permitted to attend a school-sponsored career day, college fair, or workshop on a voluntary basis.

All principals explained that career or college-oriented field trips and guest speaker events were available to students as well. At most sites, these types of activities were reportedly coordinated and organized by individual teachers or faculty members, and student attendance is often based upon course or program enrollment. Coincidentally, two principals of rural comprehensive high schools reported that their schools organize an annual field trip to college campuses for:

- All grade 11 students offered schoolwide (HS-9).
- Only members of the California Scholarship Federation (HS-6).

As for guest speaker events, the principal at one suburban comprehensive high school stated that presentations had recently occurred as often as twice per month through the efforts of the school's career center coordinator. Various college representatives and local business representatives were scheduled to speak to students at this school during the lunch hour as part of a "brown bag" lunch series (HS-2). At a magnet high school with an emphasis on CTE, the 1.5 FTE employer outreach specialist coordinated all the activities on campus for all students (HS-4).

### ***Career Development Programs***

The interviewer questioned each principal about programs offered to students for career exploration and development; these were defined to include mentoring, job shadowing, or any program through a career center that might include work-based learning or CTE.

Program offerings at the middle school level were negligible or nonexistent according to those principals interviewed. One of the three middle school principals admitted not currently offering any formal programs for career exploration (MS-3). A second middle

school principal, however, described the school's year-round partnership with the regional trade-tech community college to provide an eight-week intersession program for three of the four instructional tracks; these programs were offered a total of six times per calendar year (MS-1). In addition, two middle school principals offered after-school programs on their campuses, which allowed participating students some career-oriented activities, Internet research, and discussions with teachers about planning for the future (MS-1 and MS-2).

In contrast, high school principals' responses reflected a variety of programs offered at their schools. While each school principal reported offering job shadowing, mentoring or internships, the extent to which these programs were available for all students also varied. For example, the school-to-work programs offered at some schools were self-selected and available only to students enrolled in grades 11 and 12. These programs included one or more California Partnership Academies or career pathways electives through the regional occupational program (HS-2, HS-5, and HS-6). By comparison, several principals reported that all students were required to complete grade-level career exploration assignments and a culminating senior project that included research assignments and presentations, job shadowing, or internships (HS-3, HS-4, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9).

The availability of career exploration programs for all students was also dependent on the focus/mission of the school as expressed by the principals interviewed. For example, a few of the principals pointed out that career exploration and development was the overarching focus of their respective schools' academic program for all students: students apply and enroll at their schools by choice and specifically for the career-focused curricula offered (HS-3, HS-4, and HS-8). Other school principals reported that the availability of programs for career exploration and development was based upon students' enrollment in a particular small learning community, career pathway, or partnership academy (HS-2, HS-5, and HS-6). In yet other cases, principals indicated that while career exploration programs were offered to students at their sites, to gain full benefit, the programs required students' initiative and self-direction (HS-1, HS-7, and HS-9). For instance, a principal at one such site indicated that "some students get more involved in the programs and, therefore, enrich their learning experience more than others because it's up to them to get out of it what they will" (HS-7).

Principals at some sites also discussed how some types of career exploration programs may generate more interest, and be more popular, among students than others. Principals at two high schools with a CTE focus reported, therefore, that when student program enrollment declined, the school's administration discontinued offering these programs or developed another program to meet students' interest (HS-3 and HS-8).

### ***Career Exploration Tools***

The interviewer also inquired about whether tools for career exploration were offered, and defined them as including diagnostic and aptitude tests or interest inventory surveys that students take to begin considering options for the types of future job or career they may be interested in pursuing. Two middle school principals reported that such tools for career exploration were not offered to their students (MS-2 and MS-3). A third middle

school principal described the school's partnership with a local community college, in which students may have access to the Internet or other computer-based tools through the afterschool or intersession programs (MS-1).\*

Seven of the nine high school principals reported offering students access to career assessment surveys through licensed software subscriptions with *Bridges.com* Choices Explorer, *Naviance.com*, *GetInsights.com*, *CareerCruising.com*, or the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (HS-1, HS-2, HS-4, HS-6, HS-7, HS-8, and HS-9). Two of these principals also referred to the COIN Career Guidance System as a tool available to students at their schools (HS-2 and HS-4). Two other high school principals reported that there were no career exploration tools available to students other than general access to the Internet (HS-3 and HS-5).

Although Internet access was available at all of the schools visited, four principals reported a designated career center on campus with an ROP or work experience coordinator available to assist students in the use of career exploratory tools (HS-1, HS-2, HS-6, and HS-7). Irrespective of whether a career center was located on a campus, most of the principals indicated that students initially receive instruction and guidance on accessing the Internet and software tools according to grade-level and that their career exploration assignments were often integrated into their course work.

### ***Evaluation of Activities, Programs, and Tools***

The interviewer asked principals to evaluate the usefulness of any career exploration activity offered at their schools<sup>†</sup> (i.e., career day, college day, college fair, guest speaker events, and field trips), on a scale of one to five (very useful) in terms of:

- Raising students' awareness.
- Providing students with information about local and statewide career opportunities.

Three high school principals rated the activities offered at their high schools as very useful for raising student awareness and providing information since they were ongoing and integrated with the core curriculum. For example, at a large urban, comprehensive high school, the principal explained that the school's activities were offered on an ongoing basis through an economics course, the career center, and other activities offered

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\* In addition, this middle school offered an opportunity for up to 100 grade eight students to take a practice PSAT as a way to introduce the type and extent of information and knowledge students needed to acquire (MS-1).

<sup>†</sup> Because activities for career exploration are very limited or not offered at the middle school level, the three middle school principals did not provide a rating as being applicable to their schools. One of the middle school principals commented, however, that if more activities were offered to middle school students, she would expect the usefulness rating to be somewhat useful for both raising awareness and for providing students with information at the middle school level. The principal stated, "Middle school is a challenging time for students and they have difficulty looking toward the future" (HS-2).

district-wide approximately once per year. The principal stated, “The process of raising student awareness and providing students with information begins at age 15” (HS-1). Similarly, the principal of an urban magnet high school with an emphasis on CTE reported that weekly activities were coordinated by an employer-outreach specialist and offered to all students (HS-4). The third example was provided by a principal at a charter school with a CTE emphasis, who stated that the school’s “overarching focus [of the activities] was to reach and encourage all students” (HS-8).

Other high school principals provided a lower rating for their schools’ career exploration activities (as somewhat useful or useful) for raising awareness and providing information on local and state wide career opportunities. Some principals expressed concerns that the activities did not reach all students equally or that information provided to students was insufficient. Discussion with these principals focused on the following points:

- There were many activities but more could be done to increase students’ awareness consistently across the board. Also, it would be difficult for teachers to allow students more time (for these activities) to break from curriculum when they have only three hours of lesson time per day (HS-3).
- The activities’ rating for usefulness for providing students with information would vary and depend upon the specific small learning community (HS-5).
- The high school offers a breadth of career development programs and activities such as job shadowing, a “Connecting to Success” seminar, the *Bridges.com* Choices program, and the senior career research project. The usefulness of all activities would be rated very high for raising students’ awareness and for providing career information; however, the usefulness of the activities was dependant upon the attention, time, and effort that students dedicated to the activities (HS-7).
- The goal was to promote an infusion of career development activities into teachers’ daily curriculum; teachers were continuing to progress toward that goal (HS-9).
- Activities could be improved upon and we have a long way toward improvement in the area of providing students with information because students currently learn only about local, entry-level jobs and not about other opportunities available in the state or regional industries (HS-6).

The interviewer also asked principals to evaluate the usefulness of the career development programs that were offered at their schools on a scale of one to five (very useful)<sup>\*</sup> in terms:

- Raising students’ awareness.

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<sup>\*</sup> As reported above, middle school principals indicated that career development programs are not offered at their sites and so a rating was not provided.

- Providing students with information about local and statewide career opportunities.
- Providing students some first hand experience about a career of interest.
- Motivating students to study at current grade level.
- Motivating students to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels.

Discussions with principals at most sites indicated that the career exploration or developmental programs (defined above as mentoring, job shadowing, or any program through a career center that might include work-based learning or CTE) offered at their respective sites were considered useful to very useful for raising awareness and providing information to students. In terms of providing students with some first hand experience about a career of interest, two principals, both at schools with strong emphasis on CTE, rated their programs as very useful (HS-4 and HS-8). However, all other principals rated their programs as somewhat useful to useful. Comments from these principals regarding the usefulness of career exploration and development programs included:

- “More could be done to introduce students into the field” (HS-1).
- “Other than ROP, there are not many opportunities for first hand experiences for students” (HS-2).
- “Junior ROTC participation is increasing and three of the academies offer some first hand experience for those students” (HS-5).
- “Providing more opportunities for first hand experience would be beneficial” (HS-7).

Principals also described how useful career exploration or development programs were for motivating students to study at grade-level and for motivating students to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels. Most principals of comprehensive high schools rated their programs as somewhat useful to useful for motivating students (HS-1, HS-2, HS-6, HS-7, and HS-9). One principal at a comprehensive site rated the programs as not useful or only moderately useful for motivating students, stating that motivating students has more to do with the students’ prior experiences and expectations for life (HS-5). Principals at the alternative, magnet, and charter schools with a CTE emphasis rated their respective career development programs as very useful in terms of motivating students to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels (HS-3, HS-4, and HS-8).

Several principals expressed comments and opinions about whether career development programs motivate students to achieve at grade-level or better and to take demanding courses. One principal noted that “the programs do motivate some students who begin to realize that they can get into CSU after graduation” (HS-4). Another principal cited evidence from a study indicating that students involved in career pathways have a higher grade point average, including special education and advanced placement students. This principal further discussed evidence indicating that students who focus on a career goal often find a connection to their academics, and subsequently, perform better scholastically. The principal also stated that giving students a sense of vision for themselves will prompt them to achieve more. He explained that the general population

at his suburban comprehensive high school has a GPA of approximately 2.5, which is compared with the GPA of students involved in a career pathway who have an average GPA of 3.2 (HS-7). Additional comments from this principal and others on the subject of motivating students included:

- “A career orientation of focus seems to be crucial for students’ success and key to meeting the a-g requirements that are necessary for admission to a university. Ten years ago, 25 percent of students met the university a-g requirements, whereas today, 62 percent are meeting them” (HS-7).
- “Motivating students to study in the grade-level they are currently enrolled is important to prevent high school dropouts; this is a societal issue. Some partnership academies are helpful examples of how to make educational content relevant for students; it’s important that these programs help kids plan for the future because many students think only as far ahead as the weekend” (HS-3).
- “Career development programs are the key for some kids to stay in school” (HS-2).
- “The school was established with a career focus to give students job skills. Now, the school’s graduation rate is 96 percent, and students are focused on continuing toward college. Seventy percent seek post-secondary education; their success makes other students want to achieve at higher levels” (HS-8).

Principals also evaluated the usefulness of career development tools (defined as diagnostic, aptitude or interest inventory software) offered at their schools in terms of usefulness on a scale of one (not useful) to five (very useful) in terms of:

- Raising students’ awareness.
- Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities.

Principals at three of the comprehensive high school sites rated their tools as somewhat useful to very useful for raising student awareness and providing students with some information about local and regional career opportunities (HS-1, HS-2, and HS-9). One principal rated the school’s tools as moderately useful stating that the tools were only available to the special education students at her site and pertained mainly to identifying what career would best suit a student in general (HS-5). Another principal was unsure as to the usefulness of the tools (HS-6).

Two principals at sites with a CTE emphasis rated their career exploration tools as useful to very useful for raising student awareness and providing information.\*

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\* A third principal at a similar site with CTE emphasis stated that, other than Internet access for directed research assignments, additional tools were not offered at her school, and therefore, did not evaluate/rate the usefulness (HS-3).

## Parental Involvement

The interviewer asked principals to describe whether parents were included in any discussion, activities or programs regarding their children's career interests, whether parents were expected to play an active role in this regard, and whether any resources, tools or workshops have been developed to help parents participate in the process of their children's career development.

Middle school principals indicated that parental involvement strictly addressed academic (or persona/social) matters rather than career planning. Two principals explained that proficiency in reading and math and in preparation for passing the California High School Exit Exam is the primary focus of discussions with most parents (MS-1 and MS-2). Other than "Back to School Night" and "Open House," there were not many opportunities for parents to get involved at the middle school (MS-3). Two of the three middle school principals reported having a Healthy Start program on their campus, with one opening a parent center there (MS-2 and MS-3).

In general, the high school principals' responses revealed that parent involvement included taking the opportunity to review student academic progress through conferences with counselors and teachers. Parents were also encouraged to play an active role by helping students meet expectations for attendance, grades, and behavior. Students were expected to take responsibility of preparing and planning for their future, while parents were advised of high school graduation requirements and provided with some college application and financial aid information. To promote parental communications and involvement, principals reported the following activities, events, and programs at their schools:

- On-campus weekly meetings were convened with members of the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), where career and guest speakers presented to the approximately 85 parents who participated actively (HS-1).
- College Night information seminars were held to provide parents information regarding high school graduation requirements, helpful hints on study skills, the college application process, and financial aid options (HS-2).
- An annual "Parent Night" was held to showcase seniors' final projects. Other than that event, parental involvement was low because students might not want to include their parents in career exploration activities, and parents might not have the time or the energy to participate after their own work day (HS-3).
- A "home visiting program" was recently instituted as a way to address the difficulty of getting parents involved. This program gave the school's staff a new appreciation regarding students' family life and home conditions (HS-5).
- A "Parent Academy" was hosted twice annually with a focus on curriculum; a "Parent Night" and the quarterly parent-teachers association meetings were other opportunities for parents to participate. A newsletter was also sent home to parents. Even though all parents were invited to these events, only about 100 out of 2,700 participated (HS-7).

- Orientation meetings for new students and their parents were held annually; other special events were also scheduled throughout the year. The school site council included parent representatives; and academy teachers communicated with parents on an ongoing basis. However, principals indicated it was difficult to get parents to participate in evening activities and events (HS-8).
- At each grade level, the school offered an orientation for parents to understand the structure of what students would receive each year (HS-9).

## **PERSPECTIVES ON THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS TO CALIFORNIA’S OVERALL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES**

### **Provision of Economic and Employment Information**

To gain insight of school administrators regarding the availability of resources to orient students to their regional and state economies, the interviewer probed principals about: (1) Information that their schools provide regarding California’s overall economy or their local regional economy, and (2) Involvement that they might have with local business or community organizations to promote students’ career development.

Responses from middle school principals indicated that their schools provide no information relative to the state or local economy to their students. Most of the high school principals indicated that general economic information was included in web-based career aptitude/assessment software or obtained by students during an Internet search conducted in the process of completing career research projects. One principal stated that:

“[Economic] information is provided by the school through the student’s independent, web-based Internet research on job outlook, salaries, and skills necessary for careers, with an emphasis on continuing education and training after high school. Students must produce a seven page report that includes this information as it applies to California and the local region” (HS-1).

At each site, middle school and high school principals reviewed examples of an economic analysis that provided information about the fastest growing and largest jobs through 2014, the corresponding skill sets for the specified jobs, and their average annual salaries. Principals were asked to share their opinions on whether the information would be useful to their students. Comments from principals at each site revealed an agreement that students would benefit from receiving such information. One rural comprehensive high school principal stated that “it would be a very helpful tool for students and for teachers to connect the need to continue studying in high school and to develop career objectives and skills” (HS-6). Another principal at a large suburban comprehensive high school commented that “the information would be helpful and useful if placed on a website for students to access” (HS-7). A middle school principal agreed that students would benefit from learning information about the qualifications for various jobs, but he noted the challenges to securing time in the master schedule and funding for getting someone to present the information and align it with the existing curriculum (MS-1).



## **Engaging with Local Business and Community Organizations**

The interviewer asked principals whether their schools were engaged with local business or community organizations to promote their students' career development. Each was asked to elaborate on the extent of their school's involvement with business, how relationships with business representatives were developed and maintained, and whether students benefitted by their affiliation with business and community organizations.

Two middle school principals described a variety of ways they had engaged with local business or community groups. For example, one middle school principal reported that some students volunteered at a local children's hospital for community service hours. His school also organized a Golden Torch Awards event and was involved in the National Junior Honors Society. Each month, he participated in a breakfast with the business community. The week following the interview, the principal had planned to attend a banquet sponsored by the local Korean business community which had donated funds to his school as a way to bridge integration (MS-1). Another middle school principal, although new to the school, indicated that the school's career day scheduled for the month following the interview would involve some members of the business community (MS-3). A third middle school principal reiterated a lack of resources at her school in terms of staff and time, and suggested that business representatives should meet with the district's school-to-career coordinator to adopt a school for a career day (MS-2).

Several high school principals pointed to the efforts of individual teachers who work together within their academic departments, with administrative staff, or engage directly to recruit, manage, and maintain alliances with business and community organizations (HS-3, HS-5, HS-6, HS-7, and HS-9). Many high school sites have a schoolwide approach to networking and connecting with local industry through business and education alliance memberships or community collaborative groups, by designating some outreach responsibilities to a career center staff, school-to-career coordinator, a ROP teacher, an outreach specialist, or a business alliance liaison (HS-1, HS-2, HS-4, HS-6, HS-7, and HS-8), as the following examples illustrate.

- One principal reported that the district has an "entrepreneur" who establishes and maintains contracts with the business community (HS-5).
- Another principal at a CTE magnet school reported that both labor and management were represented on the school's advisory committee and indicated that "industry picked us by forming the school" (HS-3).

Principals commented on the importance of and the benefits gained by students and the school from developing relationships with business and industry representatives and community organizations. Some examples include:

- Engaging with the local businesses provides additional insight and educational opportunities for students (HS-6).
- Students benefit whenever they are introduced to scopes beyond their own focus (HS-1).

- Working with business has been beneficial for students in providing activities that reinforce soft skills and in allowing teachers to expand curriculum by associations with experts in certain fields. Getting students to complete work or to follow up has been the hardest challenge (HS-3).
- Involvement with local business has been very beneficial to students in providing access to resources and by creating an environment that models the work environment (HS-4).
- Partnering with the business community has been extremely beneficial based on: (1) the number of seniors staying in school, (2) our graduation rate of 96 percent, and (3) the fact that many students have jobs after graduation (HS-8).

## **PERSPECTIVES ON BARRIERS THAT IMPEDE ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

Principals interviewed at sites where career exploration activities, programs or tools are not offered were prompted to share their opinions on whether they thought it would be a “good” idea to provide them. Responses from several principals pointed to existing challenges and barriers at their sites related to: inadequate resources, no existing structure or mechanism for inclusion in the existing curriculum, and an emphasis on basic skills instruction for struggling students. In particular, principals commented:

- The lack of funding and structure for offering career exploration curriculum was eminent. “Yes, [offering career exploration opportunities] would be a good idea because the more that students are prepared for life choices, the better off they will be. However, we would have to find an appropriate vehicle to work it in; schools cannot throw things into the curriculum without a systematic approach” (MS-1).
- The need to raise test scores and achieve Program Improvement goals is critical. “It is okay to provide career exploration activities or programs in a school environment where the level of proficiency is high enough so that it can be incorporated into English, math, and social studies. But where reading levels are low, you need to focus on the basics” (MS-2).
- The lack of time and qualified faculty and staff (MS-3).
- “Developing the programs to provide opportunities for first hand experience takes long-term planning by teachers, counselors, faculty, and parents” (HS-3).
- Student demographics and their associated academic needs: The inability to provide schoolwide career exploration efforts had to do with a highly transient student population, comprised of 67% English learners, 64% eligible for free or reduced lunches, and special education students (HS-5).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PRINCIPALS**

The interviewer asked each principal to consider, based on his or her experience, what activities, programs or tools should be offered to students to provide them with an opportunity to learn about the future career options available in their local region and

throughout the state. The principals were also asked to share their ideas of what would be needed in order to begin providing such services for career exploration or development opportunities for their students.

Middle school level principals recommended a variety of options and corresponding necessary steps to realize them, including:

- Providing a career development course for students to begin exploring career options, which would require developing a course of study, including that course in the school's master schedule, and securing funding for a teacher position and instructional materials (MS-1).
- Organizing a career day for middle school students with presentations from local corporate representatives (for instance, Chevron, the Municipal Sanitation Department, or others); having a district school-to-work coordinator organize the event; and funding additional professional development to include career development (MS-2).
- Restoring campus library services and implementing a means for students to access web-based interest inventory software and other reference materials to research and explore career options; establishing a committee to discuss these issues at the beginning of the next school year; and offering students a choice of high schools to attend (MS-3).

High school principals also expressed various recommendations and ideas as follows:

- Expand the grade ten programs or provide some exposure for grade nine students (HS-1).
- Conduct an exit survey of seniors to assess the usefulness of career exploration activities from the student perspective (HS-1).
- Raise parent and student awareness by providing data to show that students benefit from career exploration and development education (HS-2).
- Bridge the gap between the federal departments of labor and education by providing certification courses that serve as alternatives to general education and academic programs. To do this requires additional funding, time, and qualified faculty (HS-3).
- Provide more resources for students to obtain two weeks of workplace learning (i.e., funding, instructors, and outreach specialists). This would be useful but would be logistically difficult and cost prohibitive (HS-4).
- Provide more guest speakers and local field trips would benefit students; to do these activities, we need more hours in the school day and more teachers to agree with this agenda (HS-6).
- Provide more in-depth job shadowing for students (i.e., a week in duration). This would require more buy-in from the business and community organizations to be more open to provide opportunities and involve high school students. We have been restricted to offer job shadowing after school only, but our certified nursing assistant program has recently been allowing students to job shadow at locations earlier in the day, which expands the opportunity for students to participate. (HS-8).

- Create special programs at the different high schools within the district so that students who have a particular interest could request to attend a different school, based on the program offered (i.e., auto shop, woodshop, etc.) (HS-5).
- Produce more teachers with expertise in career and technical areas; the shortage of qualified teachers has been a problem for schools (HS-7).
- Do a better job with the interest inventory and job shadowing programs so that more students can explore their options. This would require funding a schoolwide plan and paid staff to incorporate career components into the core curriculum (HS-9).

# Parent Focus Groups

## SUMMARY

The following chapter describes focus group discussions convened at one middle school and at six high schools to learn the perspectives of parents regarding the opportunities their children have to access activities, programs, or tools for career exploration and development at their schools, given their regional and statewide economies. In response to questions and discussion prompts, parents described the various programs offered or other efforts made by the schools to provide students with a career awareness education. The findings from these focus groups are based upon the parents' individual comments as well as the overarching themes that emerged across all of the parent focus group discussions. This summary will briefly refer to these themes, and the sections below provide additional context.

The middle school focus group consisted of three parents, and the six high school focus groups involved two to five parents each for a total of 21 parents. All references herein to the terms "parents" or "parent" relate only to those who participated in the focus groups at the selected focus group school sites and are not meant to include other parents. Each parent referred to in this report had at least one child enrolled at their school site.

This summary and the report that follows it are intended to supplement and provide context to the data collected through the Careers Project middle and high school principal and counselor survey. In general, the parent focus groups discussions revealed that:

- Middle school focus group parents have talked with their children about their plans for the future and encouraged them to study at school, to develop a special interest or ability, and to learn a skill that will allow them to work toward something they are passionate about.
- All high school parents had discussed their children's plans for after they leave high school, and many have assisted their children in finding information about schools and colleges. Several parents had visited college campuses with their children and initiated other activities to expose their children to different career fields, either through sharing their own work experiences or through introducing their children to family members or friends who shared information about their careers.
- Most parents believed career planning was essential at the high school level and that students would benefit if career planning began in ninth grade.
- Most parents would like their children to continue their education after high school in order to become productive citizens and secure sufficient income. Some parents held a goal for their children to get admitted to a four-year college or university; other

parents encouraged their children to pursue a technical training program at a vocational institute.

- Middle school parents reported not having been invited to career development activities or events. Most high school parents had been invited to participate in a wide variety of school functions such as career days, college fairs, and other events that provided them access to information to plan for their futures after high school. While notified of school-sponsored activities, many parents opted out of participating due to their busy work schedules, other family or conflicting commitments, or because of their belief that their children would benefit more if they were not directly involved with their children's career exploration activities. Some parents expressed that students (especially those in high school) need to begin choosing their own path of interest and to look for guidance independently of parents.
- Parents expressed a wide range of views about the role of school counselors and the services they expected counselors to provide to their children. Some expected counselors to facilitate students' information gathering and decision-making process for academic and career planning, while others believed the counselors' role was to be as an extension of the parents' role in teaching students to be respectful and to distinguish right from wrong behaviors.
- Recognizing that school counselors have high student caseloads, several parents commented that there were not enough counselors available to provide career guidance to their children, particularly given other priorities related to students' academic progress. Only some of the parents had met with their children's counselors, and all reported that impetus for scheduling their meeting had been to discuss disciplinary or matters relating to academic progress, not career guidance.
- At schools where the curricula emphasized CTE, parents verified that teachers rather than counselors were the most likely staff to provide career guidance information to their children and to be most familiar with their aptitudes and abilities amongst school staff.
- Middle school parents confirmed that career exploration activities and programs were offered to their children at their school (in the form of a career day, occasional guest speakers, or a field trip to the local CSU campus). Regarding the usefulness of the activities and programs, one middle school parent felt that mentoring programs would be most useful for these students.
- High school parents were also aware of the variety of activities and programs offered by their schools. Parents held differing views regarding the usefulness of their schools' career development services. While parents, whose children were enrolled at comprehensive high schools, generally thought that their school's activities and programs were valuable, some felt that students did not fully benefit from one-time experiences because there was no follow up to reinforce the concepts presented to them. Parents, whose children were enrolled at schools with a CTE emphasis, felt that their children's education was enriched by a project-based learning environment,

which allowed them to experiment in the actual field of study and involved employers. These parents thought that the most useful activities and programs were those that teach students to be accountable and responsible in addition to offering professional work skills and habits.

- Parents at the comprehensive high schools discussed the value in offering CTE and pointed to a lack of resources (teachers and facilities) to offer these types of programs for students to gain the first hand experiences they would need to pursue employment after graduating from high school. Furthermore, parents believed that some students who were not interested or eligible to enter college directly from high school would benefit from electives programs with a vocational emphasis.
- Some parents, whose children were enrolled in academic programs, such as GATE, felt that their children's enrollment precluded them from being able to access CTE courses or other courses deemed to be valuable to their children's overall preparation (such as AVID).
- Parents were aware of career exploratory tools available at their children's high schools (where available). Some parents expressed some concern about whether information would be released to the armed forces for taking the ASVAB; other parents did not think these tools were particularly useful.
- Regarding their children's experience with local business or community organizations, middle school parents confirmed that their students had not been offered opportunities through their school. At the high schools, at least one parent in each focus group reported that their child(ren) had some experience working with a local business or community organization or had participated in an internship, and they believed that the experience was very beneficial to their children. Some parents, however, indicated that the rigors of their children's academic schedule and extracurricular activities, which were deemed necessary for inclusion on impending college admissions applications, precluded them from gaining work experience.
- Parents offered some suggestions about how schools can improve upon the programs offered to raise students' awareness about career options in their local regional or statewide economies. These included:
  - Using the school's resources to their fullest potential; specifically, by re-opening the school's library so that students could use it as a resource to research career information.
  - Developing curriculum for a required career exploration course that all students must complete, which would include self assessments and exposure to a wide variety of guest speakers.
  - Beginning career exploration and education of students in grade nine.
  - Expanding student participation in programs such as AVID.

- Developing an effective mentoring program; this might involve compiling a list of potential mentors for students to contact.
- Introducing students to a wider variety of careers and occupations.
- Securing funding for supporting additional career pathways based upon research of emerging employment opportunities.
- Conducting an exit poll of graduating seniors to evaluate the usefulness of existing programs.

## **PARENTAL PROFILES AND INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION**

At the beginning of each parent focus group session, the moderator asked parents to describe their own occupation or work experience, the ages and grade levels of their children, and whether their children were enrolled in any specialized programs offered at their school. The moderator also asked about the extent to which parents speak with their children about planning for future education and career options. Following is a brief description of the overall focus groups' responses.

### **Parents' Occupations**

Regarding the work experience of parents, most of the focus group participants indicated they were currently employed in a career or job. A few participants were retired or served as community volunteers. Many of the female participants did not work outside their homes, particularly the Spanish-speaking mothers. Of those parents who had full-time or part-time employment outside the home, several were teachers or school site employees. Various other occupational fields reported by parents included a cashier at a local store, a real estate agent, an account executive, a sales and advertising representative, a recruitment director for a local higher education institution, a geneticist, and a nurse.\*

### **Age and Grade of the Focus Group Parents' Children**

A parent focus group that was convened at a middle school consisted of three parents: one father of five children ages two through 19 and two Spanish-speaking mothers who each had four children ages five through 17 years, collectively. This focus group was conducted both in English and in Spanish in order to include the two mothers who were not fluent in English. Each parent had a child enrolled at the middle school, and one of the parents had a child enrolled in the school's special education program (MS-3).

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\* Of note, at one comprehensive high school, all of the participating mothers spoke only Spanish, except one. This mother and another mother in the focus group were both graduates of the high school visited.



Six of the parent focus groups were convened at high schools and consisted of two to five parents each, for a total of 21 parents. Most of the focus group participants were mothers with the exception of two schools where one father participated in each group, respectively. Most of the parents confirmed that they had at least one child attending the focus group school site, including some who had graduated from that high school and were enrolled in post-secondary education programs. Some of the parents reported their students were enrollment in one of the following programs: special education, AVID, or Gifted and Talented Education (GATE). In addition, the discussions at one of the high school focus groups were conducted in Spanish to accommodate the five mothers participating in that group (HS-1, HS-2, HS-3, HS-4, HS-7, and HS-8).

### **Parents' Discussions with Their Children Regarding Future Career Plans**

Each of the parents participating in the middle school focus group reported that they had talked with their children to encourage them to study at school, to develop a special interest or ability, and to learn a skill that will allow them to work toward something they are passionate about. One parent reported encouraging his children to participate in academic enrichment programs, to go to the library to research careers, and to attend a college campus tour (MS-3).

All of the parents at each high school focus group site reported having had some discussions with their children regarding their plans for after they leave high school, and many parents described various approaches to assisting their children with planning for the future. Parents stated that they had helped their children find information on the Internet or at a local library about schools and colleges. Several parents had visited college campuses with their children and initiated other activities to expose their children to different career fields, either through sharing their own work experiences or through introducing their children to family members or friends who shared information about careers. Some parents also reported enhancing their children's academic experience through travel and exposure to different places and cultures.

All of the parents reported encouraging their children to seek additional training or to continue their education. Most parents, however, believed that their children were uncertain as to the specific career field or type of job they would eventually pursue.

### **PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS FOR CAREER OPTIONS**

This section summarizes the discussions that occurred during seven parent focus group sites which were convened at one middle school and six high schools throughout California.\* The focus group questions and discussion topics presented to each parent

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\* While the research team requested to meet with parents at each of the twelve schools visited, only seven sites were able to accommodate our request.

group were designed to initiate discussion on parental perspectives regarding school resources to prepare their children for career options and to orient their children to the regional and state economies. Specifically, questions and topics related to:

- The nature and extent of the parental role in their children’s career exploration and development.
- The expectations parents hold for career guidance services provided by school counselors.
- The extent of their awareness of the kinds of career exploration activities, programs, and tools offered to their children at their schools.
- Any barriers that might impede access to the schools’ resources (i.e., activities, programs, or tools).
- The nature and extent of their children’s experience with local business organizations.
- Any recommendations to provide career development services.

## **Parental Involvement**

### ***Career Planning***

The moderator asked participating parents to rate how important it was for schools to provide career planning and development curriculum for their children. The responses revealed that most believe some career planning is essential at the high school level so that students would be introduced to their options for the future. One parent commented that it was especially important to have school counselors assist students with career planning because “as teenagers, they think that their parents don’t know anything” and would, therefore, benefit from receiving information from other adults (HS-4). Parents also remarked that students would benefit from career planning at school beginning in the ninth grade “to learn what they need to do” and “so that they do not lose interest in school” (HS-1 and HS-4). One middle school focus group parent suggested that students begin career exploration as early as eighth grade (MS-3).

At one charter high school emphasizing CTE, a parent wondered whether or not the schools might be misleading students by urging them to choose a career pathway rather than requiring all students to focus on mastering the breadth of academic subjects to gain a broadly-based education (HS-3). This parent also indicated that her son had become a budding scientist since he began attending the charter school three hours per day in addition to attending eleventh grade classes at his comprehensive “home” high school.

### ***Future Expectations for Children***

In discussing expectations for their children’s future, focus group parents expressed points of view ranging from economic concerns to more general and philosophic perspectives. Parents indicated a belief that the coursework in high school determines what opportunities students will have after graduation. Most of the parents desired that

their children continue with their education after high school in order to become productive citizens and secure sufficient income. For example, two Spanish-speaking mothers at a middle school indicated that they wanted their children to “not have such hard lives, like their fathers who work in construction” (MS-3). Many parents described a goal for their children to achieve admission to a four-year college or university (HS-1, HS-2, and HS-7). Parents reported helping their children gather information about college programs and taking their children on college campus tours.

Many parents also discussed the reality that some students were not eligible for or interested in entering a university upon graduating from high school. One mother stated that her son had not wanted to continue his education until he toured a California State University (CSU) campus. After that visit, even though he was not eligible at the time for admission to CSU, he decided to pursue a technical training program at a vocational institute (HS-8). Another mother previously encouraged her daughter to attend a university after graduating from high school to pursue a career in biotechnology; however, her daughter, who was a special education student, recently had difficulty in passing part of the California High School Exit Examination. The mother indicated that her daughter had re-evaluated her college and career plans to become a preschool teacher (HS-7).

Some parents expressed nonmonetary goals and expectations for their children’s future, describing a desire for their children to “have a good life, be happy, get married, and keep learning.” Other parents discussed how their children would “give back to their community” or do volunteer work. One parent focus group discussed how their children would struggle, fall down, and then find their way eventually, while they as parents would be there to help and support their children, as needed.

### ***Parental Involvement in School Career Activities or Programs***

Parents participating in the middle school focus group reported that their schools did not extend an invitation to them to participate in any career development activities or events when they occurred. However, parents in the high school focus groups confirmed that their schools had invited parents to attend functions such as career day, college fair, guest speaker events, parent night, and open house, all of which provided students and parents an opportunity to seek information. During a focus group at a comprehensive high school where all of the participating parents spoke Spanish, many of the mothers indicated that their children relay information to them from the school, and they also obtained additional information that their children might not tell them by attending weekly “*junta de padres*” (parent group) meetings (HS-1).

As reported by at least one parent focus group, although their school invited parents to participate in activities regarding their children’s career interests, many parents were not involved because of their busy work schedules or other family or conflicting activities (HS-1). Some parents expressed the opinion that it may be more beneficial to students if parents were not directly involved in this aspect of their child’s development, and indicated a belief that high school students needed the opportunity to look for guidance independently of their parents and to begin choosing their own path of interest. One

mother related advice received from a school counselor that students were often more successful in pursuing goals and objectives that they had discovered through self-initiative. Other parents agreed that participation in students' career exploration activities would be dependent upon students' preferences and how amenable students were to involving their parents. For example, a parent said she was cautious about how she communicated suggestions to her son because he would appear disinterested if he believed she were pushing an agenda for his future (HS-7).

### **Guidance Counseling**

Parents participating in each of the seven focus groups confirmed that guidance counseling services were available to their children at both middle and high schools. Parents also discussed their views of their school counselors' roles and what services they expected counselors to provide. Responses from parents among all focus groups were consistent: parents' expectations of counselors included providing guidance and advice to students and parents about academic choices that would prepare their children for opportunities after graduation.

Parents recognized the high student-counselor caseload as a barrier for counselors to spend adequate time with every student. For example, in considering their time constraint, one parent focus group described school counselors' role as more of a facilitator to answer questions and guide students and parents on what to consider in making decisions for college or career planning and on how to find additional information independently (HS-7). Another parent focus group, however, described school counselors' role as an extension of parents to teach students to be respectful and distinguish right from wrong (HS-8). This perspective was echoed by another parent focus group who agreed that counselors do not have enough time for exploring careers with students; this parent's interpretation was because counselors spend more time with students who have "problems" than with students without them (HS-4).

In general, parents indicated a desire for counselors to have one-on-one appointments with students and be accessible to parents as well. Parents, however, stated that "there are not enough counselors to handle all their assigned students" (MS-3, HS-2, HS-4, and HS-7), and recognized that counselors may not have enough time to provide career guidance given other important priorities relating to students' academic progress in school.

Although most of the parents did confirm that their children had met with their school guidance counselor, only two parent focus groups reported that their children had received some career guidance from their school counselor (HS-1 and HS-3). All other focus group parents indicated that services provided by school counselors to their children related to reviewing and monitoring students' academic progress and helping students navigate toward high school graduation and the college application process. One parent revealed that counseling services provided to her child included a recommendation that her child apply to take courses through the district's CTE program in addition to the core curriculum courses taken at the "home" high school (HS-3).

Parents participating in focus groups at high schools with an emphasis on CTE pointed to teachers as the most likely staff to provide career guidance information to students because they are most familiar with their children's aptitudes and abilities amongst school staff (HS-3, HS-4, and HS-8). Similarly, a parent focus group at a comprehensive high school referred to a schoolwide, mandatory four-year career exploration requirement that students must complete for graduation (HS-7). The program lessons were integrated with grade-level curriculum and administered by the teachers. Parents commented that although the career exploration assignment presented a valuable learning opportunity for students, they expressed concern that the program may not benefit every student as an alternative to career guidance services by counselors, given that some students did not fully engage in the learning process.

The moderator queried parents at the one middle school whether they had met with their children's school counselor to discuss career guidance for their children, but they had not. The Spanish-speaking mothers explained that a Spanish-speaking school staff would contact them and advise them of activities and other school-related information. (These mothers were not aware that one of the counselors at this school spoke Spanish.) A father at the same middle school stated that he had only met with his child's school counselor regarding a disciplinary issue.

At three of the high schools, some of the focus group parents had met with their children's counselor individually to discuss their child's grades and academic progress toward graduation and to receive information and advice regarding college admission and financial aid assistance (HS-2, HS-7, and HS-8). Parents in each of these three focus groups indicated that their meeting with the school counselors had not included an explicit discussion regarding their child's career plans.

## **Evaluation of Career Development Activities, Programs and Tools**

### ***Career Exploration Activities and Programs***

The moderator defined activities and programs for career development to include career days, guest speaker presentations, college fairs, and other coordinated efforts such as mentoring programs, job shadowing, internships, work experience and other CTE programs. Parents at each of the focus group sites indicated that career development activities were offered to students at their schools to some degree. For example, middle school parents were aware of occasional guest speaker presentations, a career day and a field trip to the local California State University campus. A father participating in this focus group believed that these activities were a "start" for offering introductory information about different career opportunities. He elaborated that to effectively guide children, it is important to understand their developmental, social, and emotional needs, and that mentoring programs were a key component of that (MS-3).

Parents at each of the high school focus group sites also were familiar with guest speaker events, as well as job shadowing, internships, and other programs that were either integrated into the curriculum or required of all students. For example, parents participating in a focus group at a comprehensive high school with an emphasis on

college admission referred to the school's offering of Regional Occupational Program (ROP) courses such as Careers in Teaching, Robotics, Fire Science, and Computer Applications (HS-2). These parents briefly discussed the absence of shop classes (such as auto shop) and stated that students at their school site mainly take academic courses that are university approved.

A similar discussion arose among parents of a focus group at another comprehensive high school wherein parents referred to the value in offering vocational electives and the lack of resources available to schools to provide such activities or programs (i.e., trained teachers and adequate facilities). Parents in this focus group noted that some students who were not interested or eligible for direct entry to a four-year college would benefit from electives programs with a more vocational emphasis. Parents at this site elaborated further by stating that in order to graduate, each student must meet university a-g admission requirements (whether their plans include applying to a four-year college or not), and therefore they often did not have time in their school schedule to enroll in vocational electives that might offer them the first hand experience needed to pursue employment after graduating from high school. In addition, a few parents indicated that their children might not be eligible to enroll in ROP courses because of their participation in other academic programs such as GATE (HS-7).

However, with regard to career exploration activities or programs, one parent focus group described a schoolwide, mandatory requirement that all students complete specific career development objectives at each grade level. For instance, all students had self-assessment lessons in grade nine English classes; all grade ten students completed an aptitude assessment test that identified interests based on academic, social and personality traits; all grade 11 students completed a job shadowing assignment and attended a "Connecting to Success" training on presentation of a resume and appropriate conduct for job interviews; and all grade 12 students completed a 45-hour internship and publicly presented a career exploration research project for a passing grade (HS-7). While parents at this comprehensive high school indicated that their children's introduction to these different activities and programs was very valuable, they also said that one-time events such as "Connecting to Success" may not provide enough relevant follow-up activities for students to fully benefit from these experiences. The focus group parents agreed that the senior project was the most beneficial phase of their school's four-year career exploration program, which they believed may be due in part to the level of maturity of grade 12 students.

Focus group parents at each of three high schools with an emphasis on CTE reported that their school promotes career exploration and research while students learned professional work skills and habits (HS-3, HS-4, and HS-8). Parents indicated that students were taught a broader skill set through the project-based learning environment, which allowed them to experiment in the actual field of study and which involved employers and businesses (HS-3). Parents stated that the activities and programs offered at these schools were useful in raising student awareness and in providing students with information on different career options. In addition, parents reported that these programs made students more accountable and responsible for their own academic progress through presentations and group learning projects. Parents felt that the activities and programs helped students

find a connection between academics and future careers and helped motivate students to be involved with school activities and do well academically (HS-4 and HS-8).

### ***Career Exploration Tools***

The moderator defined career exploratory tools as computer-assisted software or web-based diagnostic, aptitude or interest inventories that students might use to discover areas of interest and gain information about future career options. Although parents participating in the middle school focus group indicated there were no such tools offered to their children at this level, each of the high school parent focus groups were aware of some career exploration tools offered to their children at their schools. Parents advised that tools consisted of Internet access or computer assisted surveys to assess career interests (*COIN*, *GetInsights.com* and *CACareerZone.org*, for example). A few parents at one site also referred to the ASVAB test and expressed some concern about whether their child's names would be released for military services recruitment (HS-2).

In terms of the usefulness of the career exploration tools, some of the parents stated that they had discussed assessment tests with their children and learned that the results appeared to be somewhat outdated, narrow in scope, and not inclusive of information about careers requiring technical training or certification (HS-2 and HS-7). In addition, parents noted that the assessment results may not be significantly motivating for students when they do not align with students' own perceptions about their future job or career interests, leading parents to question whether their children really understood the interest inventory questions (HS-7).

## **PERSPECTIVES REGARDING AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES TO ORIENT STUDENTS TO CALIFORNIA'S OVERALL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES**

The moderator asked each parent focus group to discuss whether their children had any experiences with local business or community organizations to provide them an internship, job shadowing, mentoring, or work experiences. Parents at the middle school admitted that their children had not had any experience with local businesses or community organizations. However, among each of the high school focus groups, there was a least one parent who reported that their child had experience working with a local business or community organization. For example, in two of the focus groups, parents reported their children's participation in an internship as follows:

- A health academy student had an internship at a hospital (HS-1).
- An automotive academy student had worked as a welder and painter (HS-8).
- A technology academy student had an internship with a member of the city council (HS-8).

Parents, whose children had participated in an internship, supported their children in pursuing the opportunity and they believed the experience was beneficial to their children. One parent reported that she encouraged her children to seek part-time

employment in the summer to gain work experience. Other parents in the same focus group, however, indicated that their children's busy schedule of extracurricular activities and sports precluded them from pursuing work experience other than community service projects which were deemed necessary for inclusion on impending college admissions applications (HS-2).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARENTS**

Each parent focus group was invited to offer general suggestions or recommendations for the kinds of activities, programs, or tools they believed should be offered to their children to promote awareness about careers in the local region or statewide. Parents participating in the focus group at the one middle school suggested the following:

- Re-open the school library as a resource for students to research career information (MS-3).\*

High school parents provided some suggestions, including:

- In considering access to career exploration or development services, focus group parents at a comprehensive high school praised the school's four-year career exploration program as being beneficial to students and especially noted that the required senior project as being the most effective in provoking students to think about their future, if the students took the learning opportunity seriously. The criticism of these parents, however, concerned the fact that students were challenged to find their own mentors, which would often present a barrier for meaningful research and exploration of the students' individual interests. Parents in this group suggested a possible improvement to the program would be for the school to compile a list of potential mentors for students to contact (HS-7).
- Parents recommended that their school offer students introductory information on a wider variety of careers and occupations and suggested the idea of an exit poll of graduating seniors as potentially useful for evaluating how students had benefitted or not from completing the required or voluntary career exploration activities and programs during their enrollment at that school (HS-7).
- Parents at a suburban comprehensive high school found value in having a career center located on their high school campus as a useful means for increasing student awareness regarding career exploration and development. They recommended that all students be required to take a career exploration course, including self-assessment surveys and listening to speaker presentations with "real people talking to students so that they could explain what they do in their career and how they got there" (HS-2).
- At an alternative high school with a CTE emphasis, parents discussed the need to secure funding to develop and support additional career pathways based upon research to determine local emerging employment opportunities (HS-8).

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\* The school's library had been closed to students because of personnel vacancies at the school.



- Some parents suggested the potential benefits of bringing career education and exploration opportunities to students earlier than grade nine (HS-4).
- Some parents recommended expanding student participation in programs such as AVID (HS-2).



## References

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- Krueger, Richard A. and Mary Anne Casey. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, third edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000.
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## Appendix 1: California Map of Nine Economic Regions\*

### California Economic Strategy Panel Regions



\* California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, Economic Strategy Panel, *California Economic Regions*. See: [http://www.labor.ca.gov/panel/pdf/CESP\\_Regions\\_100606.pdf](http://www.labor.ca.gov/panel/pdf/CESP_Regions_100606.pdf).



## Appendix 2: List of Participating Focus Group Schools

- *Hiram Johnson High School*, Sacramento – Pilot site. Recommended by Senator Darrell Steinberg’s Office.
- *Rosa Parks Middle School*, Sacramento – Pilot site. Recommended by Assemblymember Dave Jones’ Office.
- *Valencia High School*, Valencia – Recommended by Association of California School Administrators.
- *Center for Advanced Research & Technology (CART)*, Clovis – Recommended by staff of the Assembly Education Committee.
- *Mojave High School*, Mojave – Recommended by Senator Roy Ashburn’s Office.
- *Alisal High School*, Salinas – Recommended by Assemblymember Anna Marie Caballero’s Office.
- *California High School*, San Ramon – Recommended by former Assemblymember Guy Houston’s Office and Assemblymember Tom Torlakson’s Office.
- *Weber Institute*, Stockton – Recommended by former Assemblymember Greg Aghazarian’s Office.
- *LaVonya DeJean Middle School*, Richmond – Recommended by Senator Loni Hancock’s Office.
- *Weed High School*, Weed – Recommended by Senator Sam Aanestad’s Office.
- *Stanley E. Foster Construction Tech Academy*, San Diego – Recommended by Assemblymember Lori Saldaña’s Office and Senator Mark Wyland’s Office.
- *Berendo Middle School*, Los Angeles – Recommended by former Assemblymember Fabian Nuñez’s Office.





## Appendix 3: Demographic Data of Schools

Table 1: Demographic Data of Schools Selected for Careers Project Focus Groups

<i>School Code</i>	<i>Economic Region; Population Status</i>	<i>School Type; Grades Served</i>	<i>Student Enrollment 2007-08*</i>	<i>Graduation Rate (NCES Definition)*</i>	<i>Student Demographic Data*</i>	<i>English Learners; English Proficient*</i>	<i>Eligible for F/R Meal*</i>	<i>NCLB Status*</i>
MS-1	Los Angeles; Large City	Middle School; Grades 6-8	2,316	Not Applicable	1.3% African American; 0.2% American Indian, 0.6% Filipino; 5% Asian; 92.4% Latino; 0.2% White	EL, 47.2%; EP 49.8%	58.0%	Year 5
MS-2	Bay Area (East); Mid-Size City	Middle School; Grades 6-8	718	Not Applicable	35.5% African American; 4.7% Asian; 0.8% Filipino; 55.6% Latino; 1% White	EL, 39.1%; EP, 18.4%	83.8%	Year 4
MS-3	Greater Sacramento; Large City	Middle School; Grades 7-8	590	Not Applicable	23.4% African American; 0.8% American Indian; 29.3% Asian; 1% Filipino; 38.1% Latino; 3.2% Pacific Islander; 3.7% White	EL, 41.0%; EP, 17.5%	89.0%	Year 5
HS-1	Central Coast; Mid-Size City	High School; Grades 9-12	2,464	91.1%	0.5% African American; 1.3% Filipino; 97% Latino; 0.1% White	EL, 45.0%; EP, 39.3%	78.4%	No
HS-2	Bay Area; Urban Fringe of a Large City	High School; Grades 9-12	2,435	98.9%	3.1% African American; 3.0% Filipino; 18.6% Asian, 7.3% Latino, 62.3% White	EL, 1.5%; EP, 15.2%	2.1%	Not Receiving Title I Funds
HS-3	San Joaquin Valley; Urban Fringe of a Mid-Size City	Charter High School; Grades 11-12	Capacity to serve 1,350	Not Applicable	6.8% African American; 12.5% Asian; 28.6% Latino; 50.6% White	EL, 5%; EP, 99%	39%	Not Receiving Title I Funds
HS-4	Southern Border; Large City	Alternative High School; Grades 9-12	469	98.6%	14.3% African American; 11.1% Asian; 3.2% Filipino; 52.7% Latino; 17.9% White	EL, 22.8%; EP, 33.7%	76.3%	No

<i>School Code</i>	<i>Economic Region; Population Status</i>	<i>School Type; Grades Served</i>	<i>Student Enrollment 2007-08*</i>	<i>Graduation Rate (NCES Definition)*</i>	<i>Student Demographic Data*</i>	<i>English Learners; English Proficient*</i>	<i>Eligible for F/R Meal*</i>	<i>NCLB Status*</i>
HS-5	Greater Sacramento; Large City	High School; Grades 9-12	2,147	72.4%	18.4% African American; 30.3% Asian; 34.9% Latino; 12.2% White	EL, 34.3%; EP, 19.3%	63.5%	Year 3
HS-6	San Joaquin Valley; Rural Metropolitan	High School; Grades 9-12	532	80.0%	14.7% African American; .4% Asian; .8% Filipino; 32.7% Latino; 38% White; 13% No Report	EL, 8.5%; EP, 16%	70.1%	Not Receiving Title I Funds
HS-7	Los Angeles; Rural Metropolitan	High School; Grades 9-12	2,764	96.1%	5% African American; 9.2% Asian; 5.3% Filipino; 18.3% Latino; 60.6% White	EL, 4.4%; EP, 11.0%	2.80%	Not Receiving Title I Funds
HS-8	San Joaquin Valley; Mid-Size City	Alternative High School; Grades 9-12	357	59.8% (2006-07)	6.4% African American; 6.2% American Indian; 3.9% Asian; 2.0% Filipino; 72.3% Latino; 9.0% White	EL, 8.1%; EP, 51.5%	51.4%	No
HS-9	Northern California; Small Town	High School; Grades 9-12	196	97.7%	9.2% African American; 7% Asian; 13.8% Latino; 63.3% White; 4.6% Multiple	EL, 3.6%; EP 11.7%	64.1%	No

Source: California Department of Education, California School Directory (Sacramento: the Department, 2008).

Please refer to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/sd/>.

## Appendix 4: List of Reviewers

### List of Reviewers of Focus Group Moderator Guides and Consent Forms

- Erin Gabel, Assemblymember Tom Torlakson's Office
- Rebecca Baumann, Senator Loni Hancock's Office
- Shandon Griffin, former Assemblymember Guy Houston's Office
- Tanya Wolters, Senator Mark Wyland's Office
- Chris Alvarez, Assemblymember Lori Saldaña's Office
- Dr. Pat Ainsworth, Director, Secondary, Post-secondary, and Adult Leadership Division, Curriculum and Instruction Branch, CDE
- Paul Gussman, retired Administrator, High School Initiatives and Career Education, Secondary, Post-secondary, and Adult Leadership Division, Curriculum and Instruction Branch, CDE
- John Merris-Coots, former Consultant, Secondary, Post-secondary, and Adult Leadership Division, Curriculum and Instruction Branch, CDE
- Loretta Whitson, Executive Director, California Association of School Counselors
- Joshua Brady, Consultant, Counseling, Student Support and Service Learning, CDE
- LeeAngela Reid, Senate Office of Research
- Ken Burt, California Teachers' Association
- Laura Preston, Association of California School Administrators
- Jeff Freitas, California Federation of Teachers
- June Thompson, California Association of Student Councils
- Paul Richman, California State PTA
- Roman Stearns, Director for Policy Analysis and Development, ConnectEd
- Charley Cartwright, retired Executive Director, California Career Resource Network
- Fred Jones, Law Office of Fred Jones
- Dr. Lily Tsuda, Counselor, Joseph Kerr Middle School, Elk Grove Unified



## Appendix 5: Moderator's Guides

### STUDENT FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE

You have been selected to participate in a study that we are undertaking for the California Legislature. We are here to talk with you today about your opinions about what you know or what you would like to learn about the variety of jobs and careers<sup>(</sup> in California and locally, as you prepare for life after high school. This session should last for the class period (55 minutes).

During this focus group discussion, there is no right or wrong answer. Your participation today is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a particular question, please let me know. You may leave at any time. Do you mind if I use a recorder to help me remember all of what we talk about here today? No one else will listen to this tape. You may request that we turn off the recorder at any time. None of your names or school's name will be used in the report that I write. As a courtesy, please do not discuss or criticize other participants' opinions during or after the focus group discussion. Are there any questions at this time?

#### Ground Rules:

- Everyone's opinion is important; that is why you were asked to participate today!
- Please speak one at a time, so that our recorder will be able to keep track of our conversation.
- It is O.K. to disagree here; however, I would ask that you be respectful of other people's points of view.

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\* A *job* is a work role with a specific organization (paid or unpaid) such as a biologist at a particular company.

\* An *occupation* is a wide category of jobs with similar characteristics like physician, engineer, or scientist.

\* A *career* is defined as a profession or occupation (job) which one trains for and pursues as a lifework. It is understood that many people may change jobs (up to 10 times), so a career is how a person applies the skills learned and grows among different occupational choices, depending on the economy, their personal aptitudes and interests.

Before we begin, could you please introduce yourself and tell me what grade you are in, how long you have been at your school, and whether you are in a unique or specialized program (like GATE, AVID, California Partnership Academy, ROC/P, Tech Prep)?

1. What do you think you will do after you leave high school?
  - *If a student says that s/he plans to go to college, probe her/him about what the student plans to do after leaving college.*
  - *If a student says that s/he does not know, then ask him/her what s/he likes doing.*
  - *If a student says that s/he wants to get married and have children, then ask if s/he thinks that s/he will ever need to work. And if so, revert to prior questions.*
  - *If the students are in a continuation school, ask what they would have liked to have known, i.e., what career exploration activities would have been useful.*
2. What kind of job(s) or career do you think you may be interested in?
3. How did you learn about that job/career?
  - Perhaps talking to a sibling, an adult (parent, relative, or neighbor), watching T.V. or a movie, electronic games, reading about it on the internet or a book, or getting information from a library.
4. What kind of skills, school preparation or work experience do you think you need in order to work in that job/career?
5. Why do you want to work in that job/career? What sparked your interest?
6. What do you imagine your life will be like? *(Here, probe the students about the kind of home, car, and lifestyle that the job/career they have in mind will afford. Also focus on nonmaterial objectives (i.e., being well-liked and respected, making improvements to their community, society, environment, etc.)).*
7. Does your school have a school counselor? If yes, have you talked to your school counselor about your interest in this career?
  - Probe the students about how often they meet with their school counselor (if there is one at the school) and find out whether the school counselor provides career guidance to students (in addition to academic or personal/social counseling).
  - If they talk to their school counselor about career development, find out what does that consist of (i.e., websites, provide a booklet of the possible careers, discussion about economics, or other).
  - Probe further to find out whether the information they received has been helpful for them to understand what the work conditions will be like, how much it will pay, what the career path might be to “get there.”

*If there is no school counselor:*

- Find out whether a teacher or administrator fills in to provide career guidance to students at the school.
  - Probe the students to find out whether other adults outside of school who have given them advice about their career interests (i.e., parent, neighbor, relative, faith-related person, CBOs, one-stops).
8. Does your school offer *activities* (like Career Days, College Fairs, Guest Speakers, or Field Trips) or programs (like mentor programs, job shadowing, programs through a career center, computer-assisted programs, or career technical programs) about career possibilities?
  9. If so, how useful have these *activities* or *programs* been to:
    - Make you aware of the variety of different careers that exist?
    - Give you more information about what these careers are about?
    - Provide some first hand experience about a career of interest to you?
    - Motivate you to study in the grade-level that you are currently enrolled?
    - Motivate you to take specific courses, take advantage of related extracurricular or volunteer opportunities, or do additional career exploration on your own?
  10. Does your school offer any career exploration *tools* (such as diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventory) for you to explore your interests or what you might like to do for a job or career? (Exploratory is offering tools to explore and discover careers. Development is planning the career after discovery or exploratory.)
  11. If so, how useful have these career exploration *tools* been to:
    - Make you aware of the variety of different careers that exist?
    - Give you more information about what these careers are about?
  12. Has your school given you any information about jobs in your local area as well as those regionally? (Show them some examples from our economic analysis.)
    - What kinds of jobs will be plentiful?
    - Which jobs pay well?
    - What kind of career path exists?
  13. What information would you like to know, or would you need in order to learn more about the career(s) of your interest?
  14. Have you had any experience with a local business or with a community organization that might include internships (paid or unpaid), mentoring, shadowing day, work experience, etc.?
  15. If so, was the experience intended as a job for you to earn work experience credit or to learn more about your career interest(s)?

16. If yes, how useful has your experience been to:

- Raise your interest in that career?
- Help you decide whether you want to pursue that job as a career?

17. Is there anything else you want to tell us about your plans for your future, and whether your school is helping you achieve this?

We have arrived at the end of our focus group session. I would like to thank you very much for your time and participation. Before you leave, I would be interested in knowing if any of you might be interested in talking about your ideas on how to help students learn about careers at a discussion session for California state policymakers. If so, please let me know; I would need to get your contact information.

## **TEACHER FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE**

You have been selected to participate in a study that we are undertaking for the California Legislature. We are here to talk with you today about your opinions about what your students know or what you think they would like to learn about the variety of jobs and careers in California and locally, as they prepare for life after high school. This session should last about one hour.

Before we begin, please take a moment to read and sign the consent form which explains the purpose of the study and your rights as a participant. Your participation today is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a particular question, please let me know. You may wish to leave this focus group at any time, and that is fine. There are two copies of the consent form. The top one is for you to keep and the bottom one is for you to sign and pass back to me.

During this focus group discussion, there is no wrong or right answer. Do you mind if I use a recorder to help me remember all of what we talk about here today? You may request that we turn off the recorder at any time. No one else will listen to this tape. None of your names or school's name will be used in the report that I write. As a courtesy, please do not discuss or criticize other participants' opinions during or after the focus group discussion. Are there any questions at this time?

### Ground Rules:

- Everyone's opinion is important; that is why you were asked to participate today.
- Please turn off your cell phones or pagers.
- Please speak one at a time, so that Kathy will be able to keep track of our conversation.
- It is O.K. to disagree here; however, I would ask that you be respectful of other people's point of view.



## Introductions

I would like to begin by asking each of you to please:

- Introduce yourself.
  - Tell me what grade(s) you teach.
  - What subject(s) you teach at this school? Is this part of a specialized program at your school?
  - How long have you been teaching?
  - How long have you taught at this school?
1. Have you or other staff at your school developed (or adopted) a curriculum for your school for career development?
    - (a) If so, can you describe it? Is it curriculum that is shared by staff at your school?
    - (b) If so, how many years does it span? Do you coordinate with other feeder schools (elementary, middle, high school, community colleges or other post-secondary)?
    - (c) If not, is this something that is developed (or adopted) by your district or county office, or other (i.e., *The Real Game California*, which is a classroom-based curriculum)?
    - (d) Have your CTE courses been aligned to the state standards and frameworks?
  2. I understand that all teaching is for students' preparation of life; however, in your teaching capacity, do you provide any specific information to students about the practical consequences of different jobs or careers?
    - (a) If yes, what does this involve? Here we may probe the teachers about:
      - Classroom discussions (imbedded curriculum)
      - "The Real Game California," which is a classroom-based curriculum
      - Distribution of literature to students
      - Individual student or group research assignment or project-based learning
      - Field trips to local businesses
  3. Do you or does your school provide any information (such as job outlook and salaries) regarding: (Show examples of economic analysis.)
    - California's overall economy?
    - Your local regional economy?
  4. I'm going to read a portion of California law (Education Code § 51228 (b)), which requires local governing boards of schools serving students in grades seven to 12 to offer a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry-level employment skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school. People have different views about what this law requires. This may include:
    - Providing Basic Skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic)
    - Providing career and technical education programs
    - Providing career awareness, exploration, or orientation
    - (a) What do you think is the view of your local school board?

- (b) What do you think is the view of your principal?
  - (c) What is your view?
5. Do you or does your school organize career development *activities* (such as career day, guest speakers at your school, or college fair) to your students about the variety of jobs or careers available in California?
- (a) If so, how many times a year does your school offer these activities?
  - (b) If so, do all students participate in these activities, including English learners and students with disabilities?
  - (c) If so, are these activities merely “available” to students who take the initiative to access them, or is there a schoolwide plan for providing comprehensive services to all students in a comprehensive way?
  - (d) How about college-bound students? Is career development viewed as a program or service for students who are not going to college?
6. If so, how would you rate the career development *activities* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students’ awareness?
  - (b) Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities?
7. Do you or does your school provide any career development *programs* (such as a mentor program, job shadowing, a program through career center or computer-assisted program such as *The California CareerZone*, work-based learning, or a CTE program)? This may include other avenues for students to access CTE programs at alternative programs (i.e., ROC/P, Partnership Academies, adult education, TechPrep).
- (a) If so, how many times a year does your school offer these programs?
  - (b) If so, do all students participate in these programs, including English learners and students with disabilities?
  - (c) If so, how do these programs work for different kinds of students (who are college-bound, by gender, by SES, or by race or ethnicity)?
8. If so, how would you rate the career development *program(s)* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students’ awareness?
  - (b) Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities?
  - (c) Providing students some first hand experience about a career of interest?
  - (d) Motivating students to study in the grade-level they are currently enrolled?
  - (e) Motivating students to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels?

9. Do you or does your school offer any career exploration *tools* (such as diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventory) for students to explore their interests or what they might like to do for a job or career? (Exploratory is offering tools to explore and discover careers. Development is planning the career after discovery or exploratory.)
- (a) If so, how many times a year does your school offer these tools?
- (b) If so, do all students have access to these tools, including English learners and students with disabilities?
10. If so, how would you rate the career development *tools* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students' awareness?
- (b) Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities?
11. Does your school have a school counselor? Are there other personnel such as a career tech? If not, then skip down to question 12.
- (a) If yes, then ask the teachers whether they coordinate the school's career development activities, programs, or tools with the school counselor(s) or other personnel.
- After this response, please skip down to question 15.*
12. If your school does not have a school counselor or other personnel, then how does this affect your work or the ability of the school to meet the career development needs of the students at your school?
13. If your school does not offer activities, programs, or tools, do you think it would be a good idea to do so? Please explain your answers.
14. Based on your experience, what kinds of activities, programs, or tools do you think the school should provide to students so they can learn more about the careers available in your local area or in California?
15. As teachers, how would you begin providing these activities, programs or tools?
16. Do you teach your classes using a traditional master school schedule (55 minutes) or a block period(s) or a mix? Do you believe that whichever schedule is used makes a difference whether you are able to provide career development information to the students in your class or school?
17. Do you know if your school engages with local businesses or a community organization to promote students' career development? If no, then please skip down to the end. For example, they may:
- Serve on an advisory committee
  - Participate in career days
  - Come to your school to be a class speaker

- Provide job shadowing experiences
  - Provide mentoring experiences at a work site
  - Provide internships
  - Provide work experience
  - Provide apprenticeship training
  - Help teachers to learn and teach the knowledge, skills, or technology that business needs
  - Help teachers understand ways to bring real-world applications into their curriculum using instructional methodologies (like project-based learning)
  - Provide input for curricular development
- (a) If yes, do you know how your school decided which business or community organization to engage with? If so, how was that decided?
  - (b) If yes, who at your school is responsible for maintaining and managing these relationships with local business or community organization?
  - (c) If yes, can you describe whether it has been beneficial for the students?
  - (d) If you do not think your school's involvement with local business or community organization has been beneficial for students, can you explain why?

We have arrived at the end of our focus group session. Does anyone have a question?

Before you leave, I would be interested in knowing if any of you might be interested in talking about your ideas on how to help students learn about careers at a policy forum for California state policymakers. If so, please let me know; I would need to get your contact information.

I would like to thank you very much for your time and participation. We know how busy you are and appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with us today. I have brought my business card along today in case any of you would like to contact me later with any additional thoughts you might have. Thank you again.

## **COUNSELOR FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE**

You have been selected to participate in a study that we are undertaking for the California Legislature. We are here to talk with you today about your opinions about what your students know or what you think they would like to learn about the variety of jobs and careers in California and locally, as they prepare for life after high school. This session should last about one hour.

Before we begin, please take a moment to read and sign the consent form which explains the purpose of the study and your rights as a participant. Your participation today is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a particular question, please let me know. You may wish to leave this focus group at any time, and that is fine. There are two copies of the consent form. The top one is for you to keep and the bottom one is for you to sign and pass back to me.

During this focus group discussion, there is no right or wrong answer. Do you mind if I use a recorder to help me remember all of what we talk about here today? You may request that we turn off the recorder at any time. No one else will listen to this tape. None of your names or school's name will be used in the report that I write. As a courtesy, please do not discuss or criticize other participants' opinions during or after the focus group discussion. Are there any questions at this time?

#### Ground Rules:

- Everyone's opinion is important; that is why you were asked to participate today.
- Please turn off your cell phones, pagers.
- Please speak one at a time, so that Kathy will be able to keep track of our conversation.
- It is O.K. to disagree here; however, I would ask that you be respectful of other people's points of view.

#### Introductions

I would like to begin by asking each of you to please:

- Introduce yourself.
  - Tell me whether you received your school counselor credential in California.
  - How long have you been a school counselor?
  - How long have you been a school counselor at this school?
1. Have you or other staff at your school developed (or adopted) a curriculum for your school for career development?
    - (a) If so, can you describe it? Is it curriculum that is shared by staff at your school?
    - (b) If so, how many years does it span? Do you coordinate with other feeder schools (elementary, middle, high school, community colleges or other post-secondary)?
    - (c) If not, is this something that is developed (or adopted) by your district or county office, or other (i.e., *The Real Game California*, which is a classroom-based curriculum)?
    - (d) Have your CTE courses been aligned to the state standards and frameworks?
  2. What is your current student to counselor ratio?
  3. Did your school or district apply for or receive AB 1802 funds?

Explain that it is new funding for school counseling called the Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling Program, which was enacted by Assembly Bill 1802 (Statutes of 2006). SB 405 (Statutes of 2007) added a provision for individualized review of the career goals of students, and the available academic and CTE opportunities and community and workplace experiences available to students.

- (a) If your school received funding under AB 1802, has your school been able to:
    - Increase the number of school counselors?
    - Expand school counseling services? If so, how did you expand?
    - Provide career guidance (or more of it) to students pursuant to SB 405 (Steinberg)? If so, how?
  - (b) Do you develop a four-year individualized plan with each student assigned to you? Does it include career planning, high school completion, or A-G preparation?
4. On an average week, do you provide career guidance to the students assigned to you?
  - If so, how much time would that be in an average week?
  - If so, what would that typically consist of?
5. For example, do you or does your school provide any information (such as job outlook and salaries) regarding California's overall economy or your local regional economy? (Display examples of economic analysis exhibits.)
6. If you do not provide career guidance to the students assigned to you,
  - Is there some one else on the school campus that provides that service and if so who?
  - Are there other priorities (such as a focus on academic or personal/social issues) that prevent you from providing career guidance to the students assigned to you?
  - What would those other priorities be?
  - Who determines your priorities/assignments?
  - Are you able to change those priorities/assignments?
7. I'm going to read a portion of California law (Education Code § 51228(b)), which requires local governing boards of schools serving students in grades seven to 12 to offer a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry-level employment skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school. People have different views about what this law requires. This may include:
  - Providing basic skills ( reading, writing, and arithmetic)
  - Providing career and technical education programs
  - Providing career awareness, exploration, or orientation
  - (a) What do you think is the view of your local school board?
  - (b) What do you think is the view of your principal?
  - (c) What is your view?
8. Do you or does your school organize career development *activities* (such as career day, guest speakers at your school, or college fair) to your students about the variety of jobs or careers available in California?
  - (a) If so, how many times a year does your school offer these activities?

- (b) If so, do all students participate in these activities, including English learners and students with disabilities?
  - (c) If so, are these activities merely “available” to students who take the initiative to access them, or is there a schoolwide plan for providing comprehensive services to all students in a comprehensive way?
  - (d) How about college-bound students? Is career development viewed as a program or service for students who are not going to college?
9. If so, how would you rate the career development *activities* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students’ awareness?
  - (b) Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities?
10. Do you or does your school provide any career development *programs* (such as mentor program, job shadowing, program through career center or computer-assisted program such as *The California CareerZone*, work-based learning, or a CTE program)? This may include other avenues for students to access CTE programs at alternative programs (i.e., ROC/P, Partnership Academies, adult education, TechPrep).
- (a) If so, how many times a year does your school offer these programs?
  - (b) If so, do all students participate in these programs, including English learners and students with disabilities?
11. If so, how would you rate the career development *program(s)* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students’ awareness?
  - (b) Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities?
  - (c) Providing students some first hand experience about a career of interest?
  - (d) Motivating students to study in the grade-level they are currently enrolled?
  - (e) Motivating students to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels?
12. Do you or does your school offer any career exploratory or development *tools* (such as diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventory) for students to explore their interests or what they might like to do for a job or career? (Exploratory is offering tools to explore and discover careers. Development is planning the career after discovery or exploratory.)
- (a) If so, how many times a year does your school offer these tools?
  - (b) If so, do all students have access to these tools, including English learners and students with disabilities?

13. If so, how would you rate the career development *tools* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students' awareness?
  - (b) Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities?
14. If your school does not offer any of these activities, programs, or tools, do you think it would be a good idea to do so? Please explain your answers.
15. What kinds of activities, programs, or tools do you think the school should provide to students so they can learn more about the careers available in your local area or in California?
16. What do you think your school would need to do to begin providing these activities, programs or tools?
17. Are parents included in any discussion, activity or program regarding their children's career interests?
- (a) Are parents expected to play an active role?
  - (b) If so, have you developed any resources, tools, workshops to help parents play an active role in the career development process of their child(ren)?
18. Does your school use a traditional master school schedule (55 minutes) or a block period(s)? Do you believe that the master school schedule makes a difference whether you are able to provide career development information to the students in your school? If so, how?
19. Do you know if your school engages with local businesses or a community organization to promote students' career development? If no, then please skip down to the end. For example, they may:
- Serve on an advisory committee
  - Participate in career days
  - Come to your school to be a class speaker
  - Provide job shadowing experiences
  - Provide mentoring experiences at a work site
  - Provide internships
  - Provide work experience
  - Provide apprenticeship training
  - Help teachers to learn and teach the knowledge, skills, or technology that business needs
  - Help teachers understand ways to bring real-world applications into their curriculum using instructional methodologies (like project-based learning)
  - Provide input for curricular development



- (a) If yes, do you know how your school decided which local business or community organization to engage with? If so, how was that decided?
- (b) If yes, who at your school is responsible for maintaining and managing these relationships with local business or community organization?
- (c) Can you describe whether it has been beneficial for the students?
- (d) If you do not think your school's involvement with local business or community organization has been beneficial for students, can you explain why?

*(After this response, please skip down to the wrap up.)*

20. Do you think it would be a good idea to establish a partnership with local business or community organization to promote students' career development?

21. If so, how would you go about doing that?

We have arrived at the end of our focus group session. Does anyone have a question?

Before you leave, I would be interested in knowing if any of you might be interested in talking about your ideas on how to help students learn about careers at a policy forum for California state policymakers. If so, please let me know; I would need to get your contact information.

I would like to thank you very much for your time and participation. We know how busy you are and appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to meet with us today.

## **MODERATOR'S GUIDE FOR PRINCIPAL/DIRECTOR INTERVIEW**

You have been selected to participate in a study that we are undertaking for the California Legislature. We are here to talk with you today about your opinions about what your students know or what you think they would like to learn about the variety of jobs and careers in California and locally, as they prepare for life after high school. Our interview should last about one hour.

Before we begin, please take a moment to read over and sign the consent form which explains the purpose of the study and your rights as a participant. Your participation is voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable with a question, you may decline to respond. You may wish to discontinue our conversation at any time, and that is fine. There are two copies of the consent form. The top one is for you to keep, and the bottom one is for you to sign and pass back to me.

During this interview, there is no right or wrong answer. Do you mind if I use a recorder to help me remember all of what we talk about here today? You may request that we turn off the recorder at any time. No one else will listen to this tape. Your name or school's name will not be used in the report that I write. Do you have any questions at this time?

## Introductions

I would like to begin by asking you to please introduce yourself and describe:

- Whether you received your administrative credential in California.
  - How long you have been a school principal.
  - How long you have been a school principal at this school.
  - Whether your background includes teaching in a career development program.
  - How many teachers you have on staff.
  - How many school counselors you have on staff.
  - How many students you have enrolled at your school.
1. Have you or other staff at your school developed (or adopted) a curriculum for your school for career development? If so,
    - Please describe it and whether the curriculum is shared by staff at your school?
    - How many years does it span?
    - Is it coordinated with other feeder schools (elementary, middle, high school, community colleges or other post-secondary)?

If not, is this something that is developed (or adopted) by your district or county office, or other (i.e., *The Real Game California*, which is a classroom-based curriculum)?

- Have your CTE courses been aligned to the state standards and frameworks?

2. Did you or your district apply for or receive AB 1802 funds?

*Explain that it is new funding for school counseling called the Middle and High School Supplemental Counseling Program, which was enacted by Assembly Bill 1802 (Statutes of 2006). SB 405 (Statutes of 2007) added a provision for individualized review of the career goals of students, and the available academic and CTE opportunities and community and workplace experiences available to students.*

- If your school received funding under AB 1802, has your school been able to:
    - Increase the number of school counselors?
    - Expand school counseling services? If so, how did you expand?
    - Provide career guidance (or more of it) to students pursuant to SB 405 (Steinberg)? If so, how?
5. Do you or does your school provide any information (such as job outlook and salaries) regarding California's overall economy or your local regional economy? (*Display economic analysis exhibits.*)

6. I'm going to read a portion of California law (Education Code § 51228 (b)), which requires local governing boards of schools serving students in grades seven to 12 to offer a course of study that provides an opportunity to attain entry-level employment skills in business or industry upon graduation from high school. People have different views about what this law requires. This may include:
- Providing basic skills ( reading, writing, and arithmetic)
  - Providing career and technical education programs
  - Providing career awareness, exploration, or orientation
- (a) What do you think is the view of your local school board?  
(b) What is your view?
7. Do you or does your school organize career development *activities* (such as career day, guest speakers at your school, or college fair) to your students about the variety of jobs or careers available in California?
- If so, how many times a year does your school offer these activities?
  - If so, do all students participate in these activities, including English learners and students with disabilities?
  - How about college-bound students? Is career development viewed as a program or service for students who are not going to college?
8. If so, how would you rate the career development *activities* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students' awareness?  
(b) Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities?
9. Do you or does your school provide any career development *programs* (such as a mentor program, job shadowing, a program through career center or computer-assisted program such as *The California CareerZone*, work-based learning, or a CTE program)? This may include other avenues for students to access CTE programs at alternative programs (i.e., ROC/P, Partnership Academies, adult education, TechPrep).
- (a) If so, how many times a year does your school offer these programs?  
(b) If so, do all students participate in these programs, including English learners and students with disabilities?  
(c) If so, are these activities merely "available" to students who take the initiative to access them, or is there a schoolwide plan for providing comprehensive services to all students in a comprehensive way?  
(d) How about college-bound students? Is career development viewed as a program or service for students who are not going to college?

10. If so, how would you rate the career development *program(s)* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students' awareness?
  - (b) Providing student with information about local and statewide career opportunities?
  - (c) Providing students some first hand experience about a career of interest?
  - (d) Motivating students to study in the grade-level they are currently enrolled?
  - (e) Motivating students to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels?
11. Do you or does your school offer any career exploratory or development *tools* (such as diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventory) for students to explore their interests or what they might like to do for a job or career? (Exploratory is offering tools to explore and discover careers. Development is planning the career after discovery or exploratory.)
- (a) If so, how many times a year does your school offer these tools?
  - (b) If so, do all students have access to these tools, including English learners and students with disabilities?
12. If so, how would you rate the career development *tool(s)* on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 as not very useful and 5 as very useful) in terms of:
- (a) Raising students' awareness?
  - (b) Providing students information about local and statewide career opportunities?
13. If your school does not offer any of these activities, programs, or tools, do you think it would be a good idea to do so? Please explain your answer.
14. What kinds of activities, programs, or tools do you think the school should provide to students so they can learn more about the careers available in your local area or in California?
15. What do you think you would need to do to begin providing these activities, programs or tools?
16. Does your school use a traditional master school schedule (55 minutes) or a block period(s)? Do you believe that the structure of the master school schedule may make a difference in providing career development information to the students in your school? If so, how?
17. Are parents included in any discussion, activity or program regarding their children's career interests?
- (a) Are parents expected to play an active role?
  - (b) If so, have you developed any resources, tools, workshops to help parents play an active role in the career development process of their child(ren)?

18. Does your school engage with local businesses or a community organization to promote students' career development? If no, then please skip down to question 18. For example, they may:

- Serve on an advisory committee
  - Participate in career days
  - Come to your school to be a class speaker
  - Provide job shadowing experiences
  - Provide mentoring experiences at a worksite
  - Provide internships
  - Provide work experience
  - Provide apprenticeship training
  - Help teachers to learn and teach the knowledge, skills, or technology that business needs
  - Help teachers understand ways to bring real-world applications into their curriculum using instructional methodologies (like project-based learning)
  - Provide input for curricular development
- (a) If yes, do you know how your school decided which local business or community organization to engage with? If so, how was that decided?
- (b) If yes, who at your school is responsible for maintaining and managing these relationships with local business or community organization?
- (c) Can you describe whether it has been beneficial for the students?
- (d) If you do not think your school's involvement with local business or community organization has been beneficial for students, can you explain why?

*(After this response, please skip down to the wrap up.)*

19. Do you think it would be a good idea to establish a partnership with local business or community organization to promote students' career development?

20. If so, how would you go about doing that?

We have arrived at the end of our questions. Do you have a question for me? Before you leave, I would be interested in knowing if you might be interested in talking about your ideas on how to help students learn about careers at a policy forum for California state policymakers. If so, please let me know; I would need to get your contact information. Thank you very much for your time and participation. We know how busy you are and appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with us today. I have brought my business card along today in case you would like to contact me later with any additional thoughts you might have.

## **PARENT FOCUS GROUP MODERATOR'S GUIDE**

You have been selected to participate in a study that we are undertaking for the California Legislature. We are here to talk with you today about your opinions about what your children know or what you think they would like to learn about the variety of jobs and

careers in California and locally, as they prepare for life after high school. This session should last about one hour.

Before we begin, please take a moment to read and sign the consent form which explains the purpose of the study and your rights as a participant. Your participation today is voluntary. If you do not want to answer a particular question, please let me know. You may wish to leave this focus group at any time, and that is fine. There are two copies of the consent form. The top one is for you to keep and the bottom one is for you to sign and pass back to me.

During this focus group discussion, there is no right or wrong answer. Do you mind if I use a recorder to help me remember all of what we talk about here today? You may request that we turn off the recorder at any time. No one else will listen to this tape. None of your names or school's name will be used in the report that I write. As a courtesy, please do not discuss or criticize other participants' opinions during or after the focus group discussion. Are there any questions at this time?

#### Ground Rules:

- Everyone's opinion is important; that is why you were asked to participate today.
- Please turn off your cell phones or pagers.
- Please speak one at a time, so that Kathy will be able to keep track of our conversation.
- It is O.K. to disagree here; however, I would ask that you be respectful of other people's points of view.

#### Introductions:

Please introduce yourself, describe your occupation is (including if you are a stay-home parent), tell me what grade(s) your child(ren) are in, whether they are enrolled in a specialized program (i.e., GATE, AVID, ROC/P, PA, TechPrep), and how long have they been at this school.

1. Have you ever discussed with your child(ren) what they plan to do after they leave high school?

*If the parent says that her/his child(ren) plan to go to college, probe her/him about what the student plans to do after leaving college.*

2. If yes, what did this involve? For example, this may involve a discussion at home, visiting different work sites, taking your child(ren) to your place of work, reading materials, going to a public library, looking up information on the internet, etc.
3. If you have never discussed future career interests with your child(ren) yet, do you intend to do so?
4. What do you expect for your child(ren)'s future?

5. Do your child(ren) have a school counselor?
- (a) If so, do you know if your children have talked with his/her school counselor about different jobs or careers and how to prepare for them?
  - (b) What do you expect from your child(ren)'s school counselor?
  - (c) How important is career planning in school for you as parents?
  - (d) Have you met with your child(ren)'s school counselor? If so, was career guidance discussed in your meeting? (*Consider if the school has received funds pursuant to AB 1802, and whether parents have been involved pursuant to SB 405.*)
6. Does your child(ren)'s school include you as their parent or guardian in any discussion, activity or program regarding your child(ren)'s career interests? If no, would you want to be involved?
7. Are you familiar with any career development *activity* or *program* offered at your child(ren)'s school?
- This might include a career day, guest speaker presentation, college fair
  - This might include a mentor program, job shadowing, a program through a career center, or computer-assisted program such as "The California CareerZone" or other alternative career programs (i.e., Partnership Academies, ROC/P, TechPrep).
8. If so, do you believe that these *activities* or *programs*:
- (a) Made your child(ren) aware of the variety of different careers that exist?
  - (b) Gave your child(ren) more information about what these careers are about?
  - (c) Provided your child(ren) some first hand experience about a career of interest?
  - (d) Motivated them to study in the grade-level that they are currently enrolled in?
  - (e) Motivated them to take demanding courses and achieve at high levels?
9. Are you familiar with of any career exploration *tools* (such as diagnostic, aptitude, or interest inventory) for students to explore their interests or what they might like to do for a job or career? (Exploratory is offering tools to explore and discover careers. Development is planning the career after discovery or exploratory.)
- Probe them about how these career exploration tools are used to identify jobs or careers of possible interest.*
10. If so, what do you as parents think of these career exploration tools?
- What affect, if any, have these career exploration tools have had on your child(ren) (i.e., made them aware of the different job/careers that might be of interest to them or give them information about what the jobs/careers were about)?
11. If your school does not provide any activity, program or tool, do you think it should?

12. What kinds of activities, programs, or tools would you like the school to provide to your child(ren) so they can learn more about the careers available in your local area or in California?
13. What do you think your school would need to do to begin providing these activities, programs or tools?
14. Has your child(ren) had any experience with a local business or with a community organization that might provide an opportunity for an internship, job shadowing, mentoring, work experience, etc.?
  - (a) If yes, do you think that it was beneficial for your child(ren)?
  - (b) If yes or no, please explain why?
15. If your child(ren) have not had an experience with a local business, do you think it would be a good idea?
16. How did you learn about participating in this focus group?

We have arrived at the end of our focus group session. Does anyone have a question before you leave today? Thank you for your time and participation. We know how busy you are and appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to meet with us today.

Thank you!